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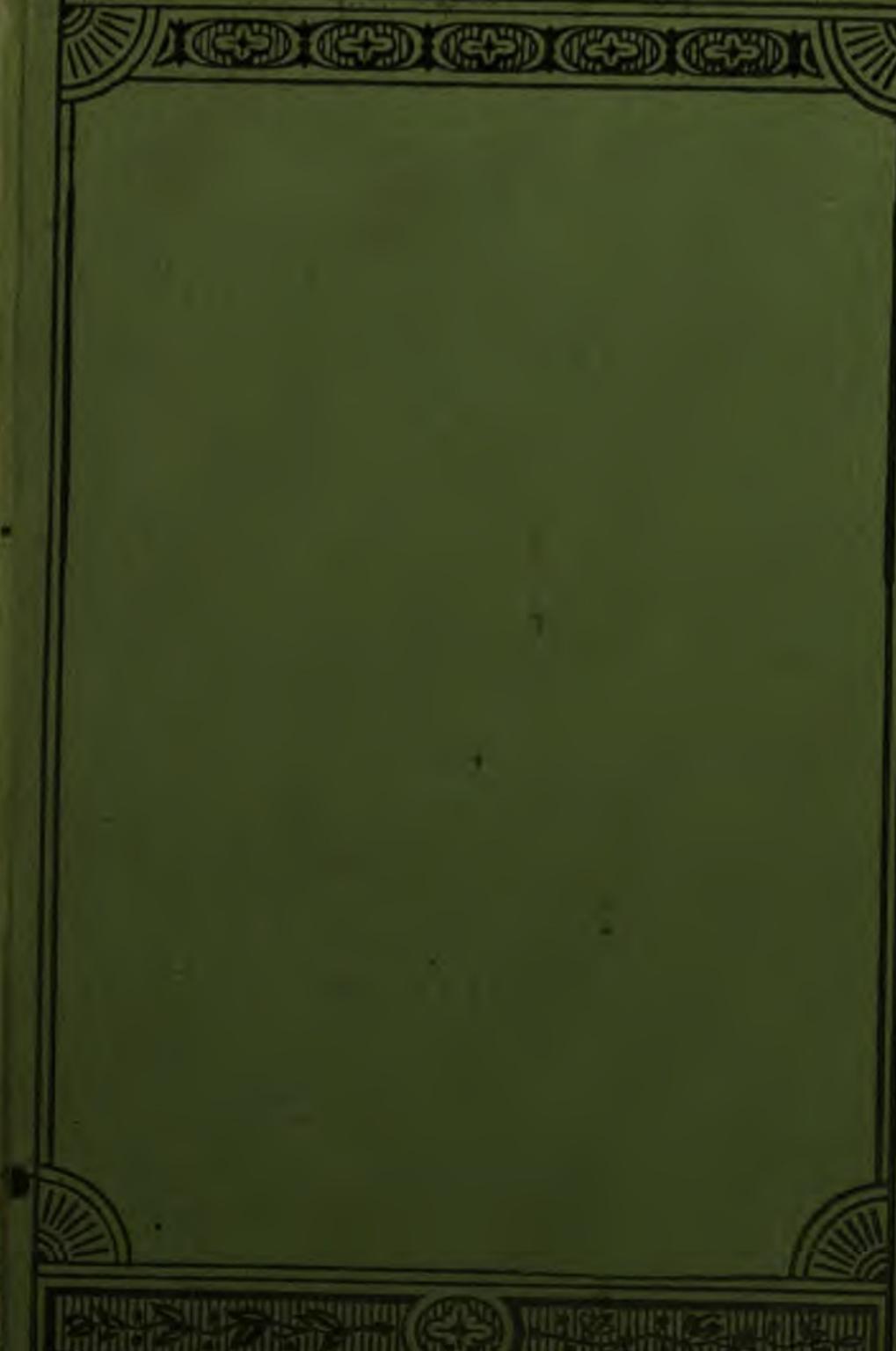
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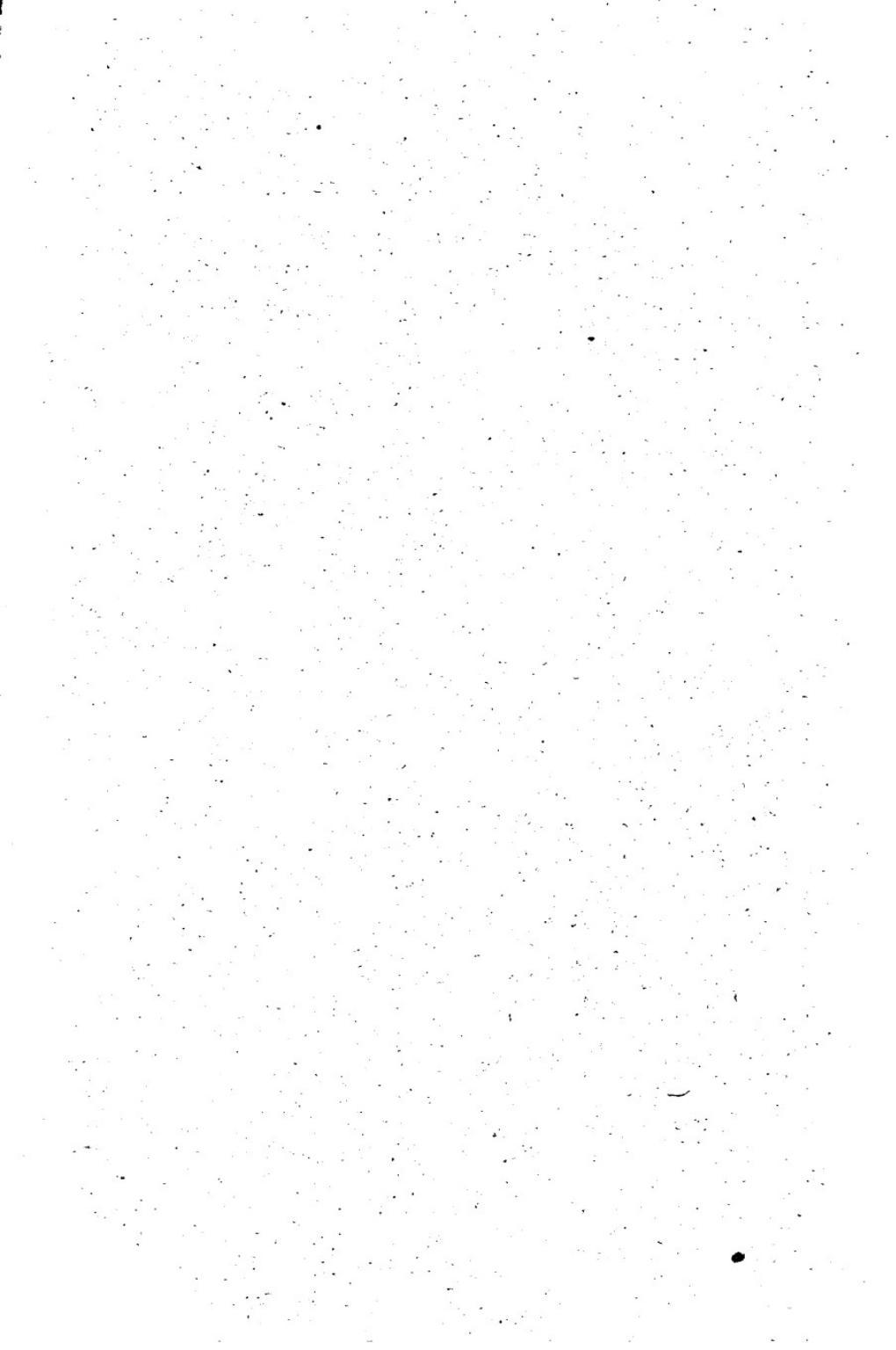
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THE PRIMA DONNA

BY

SARAH WILLIAMS

("SADIE")

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CHAPTER XVII.

PARALYSIS.

LUIGIA had gone to the Bycester Musical Festival, to take the principal soprano part in Mendelssohn's "St. Paul," Dr. Heine having graciously conceded that she sang oratorio music better than he expected.

Signor Gondio was in Germany, whither he had returned immediately after Luigia's début.

Ted had written to say that he might be expected home in a few months ; that his official employers had been satisfied, up to testimonial point, and that he had amassed a whole portfolio of sketches for his proposed work on the African flora ; also, that he hoped to exhibit at next year's Academy a painting representing "Night among the Reeds of the Zambesi."

Sir William Mabington was in Belgium, on some business connected with the fortifications of Antwerp.

The doctor was, as usual, at his consulting rooms in town, and Huldah sat in the little Hendon parlour, reading one of her cousin Evan's rare letters, which ended with : "Our squire, Mr. Morgan Griffiths, has just re-

turned from Canada. I think, if I had known his destination before he went, I should have made bold to ask him to inquire for our uncle Griffith ; it was to Canada he emigrated, and we have not heard from him for forty years."

Huldah smiled to herself, and said, "Ah, my mountain cousin, you are rather like those old country folks who will ask any stray Londoner if he has met their aunt's cousin, Mary Jones. Our uncle died, I believe, and left one son—so my father heard. I can tell you so much, and no more."

Here she was interrupted by a messenger from town, bringing word from the doctor that she was to come to him.

Wondering a little that he had sent only a verbal message, with no word of explanation, she went, and found him lying flat, on an old-fashioned sofa in his study.

He greeted her with one of those smiles that are too bright, and said, "How soon can you move here from Hendon ? "

"Move? how do you mean, Alick dear?"

"Only, that Mahomet will never be able to get to the mountain again, so the mountain must come to him."

"Mahomet,—you? immovable?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Paralysis."

"Oh, Alick! not that?" She clasped her hands, the nervous, expressive hands, which were to Huldah what sobs and cries are to most women. "Not that, Alick?" she repeated, imploringly, as though she were pleading with him for himself.

"Even so, wife; see." He pointed with his left hand to

where his right lay helpless, with such a terrible withered look, that for a moment, in the surprise, she shrank from the sight ; then, in a passion of remorse and tenderness, took the poor distorted fingers in hers, and covered them with kisses. He answered her with, "I *wanted* you," in a tone of pathetic satisfaction—pathetic, as telling how he had lain waiting, in desolate longing, for the one alone who could comfort him.

"Can we not do something?—when was this?" said Huldah.

"This morning, soon after I got here. There was a letter from the solicitors of the 'Pure Chemicals Society,' announcing the final settlement of the company's affairs, and that I should be called upon for no more payments. With a sudden sense of relief I fell back in my chair, and was puzzled at first to find that I could not rise again."

"Did you send for some one?"

"Yes, Anderson ; this is in his line ; he came pretty soon."

"What did he say?" said Huldah breathlessly, as one who waited for a verdict of life or death.

"Confirmed my own opinion ; it is not dangerous, only hopeless. I may live for twenty years,—a useless log, eating and sleeping, like any other mere animal."

The keen, ineradicable pride of the doctor quivered visibly as he said this. "If I could but have died ! You would have been better even a widow ; far better had we never married."

"Alick, hush, lest God hear you. Only live, dearest ; were you blind, maimed, even foolish, I would still thank God for preserving to me the best gift He ever gave me. If you suffer, can I not help you ? If you are weak, do you not want me ? Is it not something for me to be in

the same world with you? Only do not talk of dying, Alick—my Alick!"

"Foolish little wife. No, I cannot want to leave you; the little one would be sorry too; where is she?"

"At the Bycester Festival, you remember; she went yesterday."

"I had utterly forgotten; surely the benumbing has not reached the brain yet. I did not think it would be so soon."

"Now, dearest, that is a morbid fancy; what more natural than that to-day's events should put yesterday's out of your head? I will not have you watch yourself so cruelly, like a wild man awaiting an enemy's death; besides, honestly, I have no fear for your brain, it is not of the kind that softens or grows thick; it is too restless for that."

"Doctor Huldah," he said, answering her in a tone of tender banter, more natural than any he had used hitherto; adding, "Do not tell the little one; this is her first oratorio, and such news would ruin it."

Just then, Mr. Anderson returned to give Huldah his directions; she followed him from the room to ask, "Is there no hope?"

"None, I fear; it is better the right side than the left,—a little better."

"But he has not complained at all," said Huldah.

"Ah, you see, medical men get such a horror of complainings; they know the harm, as well as the unpleasantness, of continual self-dissection; but he tells me that he has had queer feelings in his hand and foot for some time."

"If we had but known!" moaned Huldah, for the first time breaking down, with the thought that she might have been more watchful.

"I really do not think anything could have been done even then; and you must not be faint-hearted, dear lady; you will need courage to keep up patience. Trust me to do all that can be done. Shall I help you to remove the doctor upstairs?"

"Thank you, no. I have the assistant, and Simmonds, the man who opens the door. Alick says he will have the study for our room; it is large enough, and then he can be easily wheeled into the consulting room."

"He has thought of everything I see," said Mr. Anderson, approvingly; but, as he left the house, he muttered, "Poor Murray! I am afraid he will not be called for much in the consulting room; his practice had one great shake in the downfall of that company, and now this will knock it on the head altogether."

A similar thought flashed through Luigia's mind, after the first shock of the news which greeted her return; she put away the suggestion, reproaching herself for heartlessness, but it was verified.

When the doctor recovered, in a measure, he would be dressed and carried into the visitors' room, day after day, to wait, with the pitiful patience of hope deferred, for the patients who seldom came.

If they had but known, those fanciful ladies, who alighted sometimes, like rare birds,—if they had but known how truly the once busy physician now gave them "his best attention,"—how, as his once robust life flickered and faded in the confined air of the three rooms which seemed like his prison, he felt inclined to cry out at them, "Do you really know what suffering is?"—how "that fidgeting music" which came, indistinctly, on their irritable nerves from the top of the house, was in reality the chief support of the family!

Happily, the doctor's sensitive independence did not fret against this last. He grieved a little sometimes that "the little one could not have her earnings for herself," but he and Huldah had so perfectly made Luigia their child, that they no more felt their dependence upon her than she had done hers upon them.

As in the beginning, Luigia's great difficulty with her voice was its variableness ; fatigue, or emotion, or a change of weather would reduce it all at once to a mere octave of notes. But, fortunately, whatever else went, the charm of expressiveness remained ; and sometimes, when most veiled, the power of its pathetic, sweetness would cause the entranced audience to declare that they, alone, had heard Miss Rameau at her best. She had chosen to be so styled, instead of Mademoiselle, though admitting that "Miss" was the ugliest word in the language ; but she asserted, and was seldom contradicted, that, whatever they might be as artists, English singers ranked incomparably higher as women, and she chose to be what in fact she was, an Englishwoman.

One night, as Huldah and Luigia were driving to a concert, a child was knocked down by their horse ; happily no hurt was inflicted, but the alarm affected Luigia's voice, and it was scarcely usable when she reached the hall ; so, instead of the bravura air set down for her, she substituted the only thing she could think of on the spur of the moment,—a transposed version of Heinrich Proche's "Song of the Blind Girl;" singing it in English, to suit the audience, which was very mixed. She feared that, there being no visible excuse for her in the weather, the simple air would be received with displeasure, but just as the last notes died away a poor old woman in the gallery cried out, apparently involuntarily, "God bless

her! "Tis my own blind girl that died." This began a roar of applause, and, inspirited by that, she was able to give the favourite scene for her second song.

After the superfluous fashion of misfortunes, another came just now. Mr. Wrandon Foxe, whose rent had nearly paid theirs, gave up his rooms, an old aunt of his having died and bequeathed him her town house.

"Tiresome woman! why could she not live a little longer?" said Luigia, with the coolness they always assumed now in mentioning troubles before the doctor; but the weeks went on, and no successor to Mr. Foxe appeared. The house, though large and handsome, was in that tabooed region at the back of Park Lane, which has for years been given over to the doctors, to repent, in dust and ashes, for its youthful follies as Mayfair. They began to despair of a tenant.

Luigia's personal expenses were necessarily larger than she would have chosen them to be, and, between the seasons, her supplies stopped.

One dreary November morning she said to Huldah, "I wish I had accepted that Madrid engagement."

"For the Opera? No. We have kept clear of theatres so far; besides, you are too young to take that journey alone, as you would have been virtually."

"How much money have we?"

"Five pounds."

"Auntie!" Luigia's exclamation was dismayful; both herself and Huldah had been almost penurious, but they had forgotten, because they would not remember, that the doctor alone cost more than all their Hendon expenses had been. "Keep up his strength, and don't let him get too stout," had been Mr. Anderson's apparently simple directions; and at first it seemed that a little

jelly and fruit, and so on, were mere trifles added to the day's expenses, but they had eaten up Huldah's income.

"I am glad we dismissed that hungry assistant," said Luigia ; "could we not part with Simmonds ?"

"Not well ; there must be some one to open the door when the patients do come, and he helps the doctor in dressing."

"I had forgotten that ; yes, he must stay ; but, auntie, how long can one live on five pounds ? I have no engagement for a month ; it would be convenient if we could hyberenate, asleep, dormouse fashion. I wonder if I could get some pupils quickly."

"No," said Huldah ; "Dr. Heine charged me not to let you do so."

"Oh, that was only because I never could remember how many vibrations went to a note."

"He said it would over-work your voice, and ruin it."

"Well, I suppose that would be poor prudence. We owe nothing, do we ?"

"No, that is one good thing."

Here their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the postman.

"Only a letter from Evan, our cousin," said Huldah ; "that must wait till I have given the doctor his breakfast."

"I shall go and practise till you are ready for yours," said Luigia.

She went to the piano and tried to sing, but found her throat unmanageable with hysteria ; so, the tears raining unheeded into her lap, she sat playing fragments of those solemn airs in which the great among musicians sighed forth the griefs they could not speak. The dying Mozart, and Beethoven the broken-hearted, seemed to stand

before her, with a black mirror, all independent of witchcraft, that showed the doctor's practice dwindled and gone ; Huldah wearing out, in the care and watching and toil of her life ; and she herself perhaps displaced from the public favour by some new star, or with her earnings at best precarious. Luigia was looking despair in the face, and she shivered, as though it had been death. Some stir in the air made her look up. Huldah stood there, an open letter in her hand, her face tearful but radiant.

“ What is it, auntie ? ”

“ God is good. God is tender over all His children. See ! ” She held out a paper ; it was a cheque for five hundred pounds.

“ Where from ? ” said Luigia, bewildered.

“ Evan.”

“ Evan Prys, our cousin ? ”

“ Yes ; he says it came to him a few days ago from the Duke of Cleveland, with a letter stating that he, the duke, had only lately found among his mother's papers a memorandum of the transaction, which did Mr. Prys, senior, so much credit ; that he was sure the duchess, his mother, did not intend to retain the money, had she not died so shortly after ; and that he had much pleasure in returning it.”

“ What money ? ” said Luigia, still puzzled.

“ Evan's mother forged the duchess's name for five hundred pounds ; she was only the tool of another, and received none of the money, but her husband saved the amount to repay it, and she did so after his death.”

“ But what are we to do with it ? ”

“ Use it, Evan says, till he asks for it ; he says the farm does not need money now, and he knows of no

good investment ; that, if we like to take it as a gift, he shall feel no poorer than he was before it came to surprise him."

"The doctor will never consent."

"Evan seems to fear that ; he says, 'Tell the doctor he may pay me five per cent. yearly interest, if he likes.'"

This was a skilful stroke of Evan's ; the doctor agreed at once to receive the money as a loan of investment ; only stipulating that Evan should be warned, before he finally intrusted it to them, that his great London cousins were very poor."

"That is just why he sent it, I believe," said Huldah ; "I have told him most of our troubles, for the comfort of his counsel ; that man is a living Bible, speaking not irreverently."

Luigia could only repeat her aunt's "God is good ; God is tender over all His works." The lesson against despair lasted her all her life long.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A WEB OF DIVERS COLOURS.

NE evening in January, Luigia came in from a concert, rather early. The doctor greeted her with unusual brightness, saying, "Mr Foxe's successor has presented himself."

"I am so glad ; is he contented with the old furniture ?"

"Yes, quite," said Huldah.

"Charming person ; will he pay the same rent ?"

"Yes."

"Delicious ; it will be a respectable addition to our income ; perhaps we may begin paying back that money to Mr. Prys."

"Yes, but the new occupant wishes to see you."

"Me ? what for ?"

"He did not say." The doctor spoke coolly, but his lips were quivering.

Huldah said, "It is Ted come back."

"The dear old Ted ! Where is he ?"

"Cleaning hisself, Mrs. Yicks would say ; you must wait a bit."

"But what did you mean about the rooms, doctor?"

"That was all fact: he is to have them on those terms; the foolish fellow has hurried home with the idea of helping us, and that seemed the readiest way."

"How funny it will seem!" said Luigia, as she went to change her dress.

"Funny?" repeated Huldah, doubtfully, looking at the doctor, who, of course, read her thought.

"Yes," he said, quietly. "I suppose, according to all law and precedent, these two young people should fall in love forthwith, and we be enraged thereat; but I really do not see why either event should happen, of necessity."

"You think we should let them alone, in any case?"

"Certainly; they are good children, thoroughly high-principled, both of them; and I verily believe they have grown so through not being watched and trained to botheration."

Huldah was always contented when her husband was, so she gave herself up with him to the full enjoyment of their boy's return, laughing over the doctor's comical delight at Ted's development into "such a gentlemanly fellow, Africa being a queer place to go to for manners." But Ted's position there had been a little peculiar. Sir Charles Durnston was the first consul appointed to the settlement, and he soon found that, for the conduct of himself and his subordinates, he must choose between two styles—American slipshod and Portuguese stately. He preferred the latter, and, in course of years, there had grown round him quite a little court; rather Grandisonian, perhaps, but the best possible school for the rough-and-ready young Londoner. As Ted rose to meet Luigia when she re-entered the doctor's room, she scarcely knew the bronzed, bearded gentleman, whose slight haughti-

ness was too unconscious to be ungraceful. But, above the grim beard and the steadfast lines of the new face, shone out the soft, laughing eyes of the old. As these met hers, Luigia gave a low, glad cry of perfect recognition.

It was not perhaps strange that, as they clasped hands, both remembered Ted's parting words, claiming Luigia as his little princess ; but she only thought of them with a calm, tender regret, as part of a fanciful friendship which they had both cutgrown ; while he felt his cheeks burn at what seemed now the presumption of his speech, looking at the Luigia before him. "I suppose," he soliloquised afterwards, with a little bitter self-contempt, "I am not the first simpleton who has fallen in love with the child, to find himself awed by the woman." This feeling might have worn off, or ceased to trouble him, but for the double character in which Ted was continually seeing his child sweetheart—the gentle, patient nurse of the morning, soothing the doctor when irritable, and cheering him when sad (cooped up as he was, with restless, unsatisfied energies, he was often both); and the gilded queen of the evening, flashing into Ted's painting room, with her brilliant dress and merry smile, to inquire whether he "did not think it needful, in the cause of art and justice, to come and kiss her?" He came to listen, more often than she knew, stealing into hidden corners, to drink in her wonderful liquid notes, and tremble at the burst of applause which always followed, lest it should spoil her. But there is not much in public praise to harm a woman; it is too general and broad. A pretty girl in a ball-room, a country maid at a fair, will incur more dangerous flattery, because more direct and personal ; and because, too, there is less respect in it; for, however

freely men, some men, will speak of an artist woman, there is always underlying the crowd a deep reverence for any of God's gifts, and this refines their adulation into a pure, exalted stimulus ; humbling, because presenting continually the highest ideal, to which all excellence is but an approximation.

Ted found that he was growing vaguely and, as he said to himself, absurdly jealous ; jealous even of the memory of the dead.

Cecil Mabington's dog, Faust, had developed out of puppy-hood into a sober, middle-aged dog, gravely indifferent to caresses, but one day Ted carne upon him curled up on Luigia's lap.

"How fond you are of that dog," he said, discontentedly.

"I should think so, he is the only friend who has seen me cry for years."

Perhaps it is impossible to speak of tears without bringing them into one's voice ; evidently something in Luigia's tones touched little Faust's train of associations : he raised himself on two paws, and leaning his soft flossy head against her breast, looked up in her face, with an air of quiet sadness, strange in a dog.

"You must have cried over him often," said Ted, touched in spite of himself.

"Ay, often."

"Do you keep him always ?"

"No, only while Sir William is abroad ; he will take him away this evening ; he returned yesterday."

Sir William had been much grieved by the doctor's illness, and would have been home sooner, but that, as he said with quaint simplicity, he went round by Stamboul to get a good kind of invalid lounge that he had once seen there.

"A tolerable round from Antwerp," said the doctor.

"Oh, I am a good traveller; it was only starting home from Malta instead of Ostend."

"But could you not have ordered what you wanted?" said Huldah.

"Ah, your notions of tradespeople are English; a Turkish shopkeeper calmly looks on, while you hunt for what you want, and only wakes up at the question of price."

"The fact was," said the doctor, "you thought the 'sick man' of Europe must be the highest authority for an invalid couch; it certainly is—perfection." And the doctor settled himself in the luxurious content of one who had been for months alternating between rests either too soft or too hard.

"Yes," said Sir William, "the Turks do understand the question of repose; it seems to be the only one they have studied intelligently."

"May I ask Sir William to take charge of that money of poor Tuezek's?" said Ted.

"Certainly, if my housekeeper should be the missing widow; her name is the same. I will have her up and question her when I go home to-night."

Accordingly, Mrs. Tuezek was summoned to a conference with her master, and came in a pleasant flutter of anticipation, which was steadied by his first question, "What was your husband, Tuezek?"

"Valet to an officer," said Mrs. Tuezek, startled into exact truthfulness.

"What was the officer's name?"

"Mr. Charles Durnston, sir. I did hear that he came into a baronetcy afterwards."

"Did your husband go to Africa with him?"

"So I heard long after, but he left me all of a sudden.

His master had got into some difficulty with his debts, and sold his commission, I think ; they started for Italy, or somewhere, first."

"Your husband died in Africa, and left you his savings —five hundred pounds."

"When did he die, did you say, sir?"

"In the spring of 1859, I believe. He wished his executor to wait till he came to England, so as to bring the money himself."

"Lord save us ! I had married another man."

Mrs. Tuezek, forgetting herself in her dismay, sank into a chair.

"I have always known you as Tuezek," said Sir Williard.

"Yes, sir ; my second husband was no credit to me, nor his name neither : ladies wouldn't have liked a house-keeper called Mordecai ; so when he died I dropped it, and took the name of my first. Poor Tuezek ! I thought he was dead surely. What ever have I been guilty of, sir ?"

"Bigamy, I suppose."

"Can they take me up for it, do you think, sir ?"

"I should say not, as they are both dead. What was your first husband's Christian name ?"

"Matthew."

"And yours is—?"

"Mary-Ann."

"All quite correct. Mr. Vindon, I have no doubt, will be happy to hand you the money."

"Mr. Who, sir ?" said the hapless woman, her eyes widening, as if she saw a new horror.

"Vindon—Edward Vindon, Dr. Murray's adopted son ; he met your husband in Africa."

"Good Lord, deliver us ! I ask pardon, sir, on my bended knees I say it ; but meet that young man, face to

face, him knowing all that, I cannot. If you could, sir, and would, let him give you the money for me, I'll sign anything, or do anything, except see any one that knows about me."

"Well, I suppose your receipt will be sufficient; there is no will for you to administer; the sum was simply handed to Mr. Vindon for you. I think you owe him some gratitude."

"Humbly and truly, yes, sir—if he would take some small present?"

"No, I don't think he would like that, thank you, Tuezek."

"I ask pardon, sir; but you won't let him see me? It is just Bible truth that I shouldn't know how to demean myself to him, after thinking I was a respectable woman all these years."

Ted had no particular desire to see Sir William's housekeeper against her will, so the matter was arranged in her chosen fashion, and Ted declared himself much obliged to her for turning out to be the right woman.

"I was afraid," said he, "that I might have to hunt up my aunt."

"Ah," said Sir William, "that unpleasant woman I have heard the doctor speak of—what became of her?"

"She was in Somersetshire when we last heard of her."

Mrs. Tuezek, of all people, took to reading law; stealing into Sir William's library on all possible occasions, to try and discover whether, under present circumstances, she could be "taken up for bigamy."

Ted's African picture was much praised, especially for its soft slumberous light. Though the title, "She sleeps, our Mother Earth," was pronounced too fanciful, it was

admitted that the expression he had contrived to put into the still reeds, and the flowers nodding on their stalks, was something wonderful; even the water seemed to be breathing rest, under the gossamer cloud-curtains that half veiled the moon—a soft, pale moon that, “like a child’s fair face, did rest against the bosom of the hills.”

A rumour got about that the artist had gone to Africa on purpose for the picture, and this, appealing to the two strongest British passions, love of pluck and love of money, sent the price of the painting up wonderfully. Ted gained patience with gossip, when he found that it had helped him to three hundred pounds; but the money was needed before it could be received. About this time there was a monster concert at one of the large theatres, and, to oblige the promoter, Luigia sang. It was a warm, damp day, and to fill the great space she was obliged to exert her voice to its utmost; the house was abominably dirty, and the pit contained an unusual number of “the great unwashed.”

“The air was positively thick with exhalations,” said Luigia, when she returned, adding, “I wish you would look at my throat, doctor; it feels excessively queer.”

He looked; the opening was a deep, brown red; round the tonsils was forming a milky film.

“Go straight to bed, my child,” he said, gently. Then, when she had left the room, the doctor looked up at Huldah through the tears, which not all his own suffering had brought into his eyes.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Diphtheria.”

Luigia’s illness lasted long; not the acute disorder, but the consequent weakness; a general prostration

which made her, as she said, "curiously good," even when she was forbidden to sing for months. This was not the resignation of stupidity ; she saw clearly enough what was being risked—not only money, but position, for the homely old proverb, "Out of sight, out of mind," is terribly true of a public favourite. But still Luigia waited, in a soft, bright calm, that sometimes troubled Huldah, it seemed so like the beginning of the long, long sleep.

It might be that this peace of Luigia's was, however unconsciously, the result of Ted's presence in the house; not only giving her the constant, delicate care which seems peculiarly the forte of some strong natures, but taking up the burden of responsibility which her weak shoulders had let fall.

Now, for the first time in his life, Ted painted for money, sending off picture after picture, till he became as famous for rapidity, as he had been for excellence. But it was a fatal change.

One day, when Luigia was nearly well, she came into his painting-room with a message from the doctor. Ted sat at his drawing-table, a débris of torn sketches lying about him, his head bent down upon his hands, which had ruffled the dark waves of hair into the very fashion of his boyhood ; but the tension of the fingers was such as boyhood never knows.

Luigia waited ; hitherto he had always heard her softest foot-fall, but now he did not seem conscious of her presence. She ventured on a little, low "Ted." Then he looked up, disclosing a face that frightened her—a face absolutely dead, in its rigidity and pallor. It impelled her towards him. Laying her hand on his, she said, "What is it—Ted?"

As she touched him, a flood of life surged over his face ; grasping her hand as men cling to one that holds them from drowning, he laid his head down upon it, and cried—cried as a man cries rarely, a woman never.

Utterly carried beyond herself, Luigia soothed him with softest words and caressing touches, only repeating from time to time, “What is it?”

At length, he answered her: “Only a threatened action for forgery.”

“Forgery ! but you are innocent.”

“No, guilty ; not against them, perhaps, but against myself.”

She stood gazing at him, utterly incredulous. He went on, with a desperate calmness, “I called on Nunn, the dealer, this morning ; found him in a great rage, stalking about like an old tom-cat on the tiles, I remember thinking—in another life it seems now. Presently he burst out upon me with his grievance. Lord Harry Varne, one of his best patrons, had returned him my last painting, as a detected forgery, giving him the option of refunding the money or standing an action.”

“A forgery on whom ?”

“Myself—the Edward Vindon of only last May. A friend of his lordship, a connoisseur, who had bought the Zambesi picture, called on him to see his last purchase, and both agreed that the painter of the one could never have perpetrated such a vile daub as the other. Those were his terms of description, and as true, too, as death.”

“But was this picture yours ?”

“Yes, more shame for me. I have been painting worse and worse for months. I drew my penknife through the thing, told Nunn he should have the money

to-morrow, and staggered home, vowing never to touch a brush again. God gave me the gift. I polluted—destroyed it ; sold it, Judas-like, for forty pieces of silver. In natural sequence, now I should go and hang myself. Would it be enough, I wonder, to go out and weep bitterly ? I could do that,—ay, bitterly ! ”

He bowed his burning forehead down upon her hand again ; then, as though the touch revived him, said, with a half smile, “ I came home half mad, I believe, for the first thing I can remember is looking up to find you standing by me, and confusing you with Dante’s Beatrice.”

“ And it was all for us,” said Luigia, sorrowfully.

“ That is the only thing that redeems it ; with that thought I have tried to salve my conscience, my art conscience—that all was for the home, and for you ; for, Luigia—listen—there is a courage of despair : now, when I am utterly degraded and ruined, I dare tell you what I never dared before—that I love you—love you with the one love,—do you heed me, dearest ? —that I must, will love you. Tell me how mad I am—tell me that you hate me, despise me, from henceforth will ignore me ; then I can go away, dog-like, into some hole to die, or to live, as the case may be ; but not till then. Tell me that you hate me.”

“ Hate you, Ted ? now ! ”

“ Then, if not,—I think those who have gone through such troubled waters together must have stirred hate or love,—do you love me, Luigia ? Speak, dearest ; don’t, for Christ’s sake, play with me.”

At the faint shadow of reproach in his tone, the tears, kept back hitherto, flooded Luigia’s eyes ; with the gesture of a grieved child, she slowly raised her lips for him

to kiss. He pressed her face to his, almost answered ; but still, with the incredulity of one who finds a treasure, repeated, "Tell me if you love me."

Then, with a simplicity that gave the words almost the solemn asseveration of an oath, she said, "I love you, always," and a silence as of heaven sealed her utterance.

In the midst of sorrow, Love the Divine had descended, and, bathed in its glory, the two young souls trembled with joy, like butterflies new born into the light.

That evening, with the twilight for a veil, Luigia said, "Auntie, Ted loves me—little me, with my pale, drab face, so ugly and so thin."

"And what does 'little me'?"

"Love him—ah ! so well, and I did not know ; my love lay asleep, but it grew while it slept. Auntie, is not love a wonderful thing ? It creeps into one's heart like a little stray bird, and then, all at once, it is the king of eagles, and bears us up to heaven."

"Yes," said Huldah, "even God is love."



CHAPTER XIX.

“A MONTH OF SUNDAYS.”

HT was possibly strange, but certainly true, that the two young lovers were all the happier for not being plunged at once into the question of their marriage ; that was so evidently impracticable at present, that they were content to let the matter rest, and, like two children on a summer day, walk hand in hand, they knew not whither, nor how long.

Huldah and the doctor had, emphatically, that gift of family reticence, born of respect and trust, which maintains the harmony of so many English households ; they no more thought of ruthlessly dragging up these two glad hearts for inspection, than they would have been guilty of an impertinence out of doors. They simply alluded to the engagement by saying, “ You must not feel bound to us in any way, you know, children.” The natural result of which was, that “ the children,” in dismissing the subject, agreed as a matter of course that the home of the elders must be secured before they thought of their own.

Thanks probably to the long, thorough rest, Luigia's voice came back, richer, stronger than before, and, for a wonder, the public had not forgotten her. It seemed that there was something unique in this young singer; growing, perhaps, out of her singular mixture of races, which gave her the combination of Welsh simplicity and earnestness, Italian passion and grace, and what she would herself have disowned, French tact.

Miss Rameau's return, at her concert, was one of the events of the season, said the papers, and realised enough, said Luigia joyfully, to enable the little household to forget all about money for a while.

Ted held to his resolve not to paint for a year at least, but said that he had relinquished his first idea of crossing-sweeping, as too ambitious, and meant to try teaching instead.

The doctor had a friend who was professor of drawing at a college, so Ted went to him.

"What news?" said Luigia, on his return.

"An under-mastership at once; comically enough, he had been debating whether I would accept it. The boys have got up a sort of craze for my style, and, as we have outgrown the principle of giving young people only what they don't fancy, he thought of writing to me. We agreed as to terms at once, so there are only the forms to go through."

"I am so glad—how nice of Mr. Millgall!"

"Yes, he is a first-rate fellow; but oh, such a goose of a wife! That seems the natural adjunct of a distinguished man."

"Well," said Luigia, reflectively, "I think if I was a man, I could not marry any of the clever women I have seen."

"Rather a magnanimous admission that, if you ever use a looking-glass."

"Oh, I cannot call myself clever, with my one trick ; I only wish I was, I would willingly accept all the pains and penalties. But somehow, personally, intellectual women never seem to make the best of themselves ; they often have beautiful faces, if they would not let them grow so hard, and they are generally unselfish and good-tempered ; I suppose they are above small angers and meannesses. But one cannot love a mere bundle of fine qualities, that jerks itself about ungracefully, and dresses nohow, and speaks in a voice all out of tune ; people might as well find out their natural key-note, instead of trebles growling, and deep voices squeaking ; but stupid women do that as well, and they are horrid, too, in other ways."

"I wonder what precise shade of ability you would approve of," said Ted, laughing at her.

"Well, I fancy, something like auntie's ; plenty of it, but covered by a soft veil of womanliness. The doctor never guessed that she knew Latin, till she had to write his prescriptions for him."

"Do you know, I hope—I am almost sure—that he is getting better."

"In spirits ; I have fancied so too."

"He brought the tears into my eyes the other evening when we were alone ; you were upstairs singing Mendelssohn's 'Song of Night.' He sat listening, repeating the words softly to himself, till it came to

'Join ye with me the Lord to praise,
Till morn again sends forth His rays.'

He gave these aloud, then sat looking out at the grey twi-

light clouds, with that wonderful bright, soft look his eyes used to take long ago ; a look at once exulting and tender. By and bye he said, ‘Huldah will be glad.’”

They were not kept long in doubt. The next evening, when the little party gathered, as usual, in the doctor’s room, he pointed to a slip of paper lying on the table, and said, “Take it up, wife,” she did so, and read on it, “Huldah.”

“Who wrote this?” she asked.

“Whose writing does it resemble?” said the doctor.

“It is curiously like yours.”

“Look on the other side.”

She read, “Nurse discharged.”

Then a wild, young hope sprang up in her heart. Almost imperiously, she said, “Tell me, Alick.”

“Just that, dear wife. I wrote it. God is good: I am not to be a useless log always; the hand and arm answer to my will now, and it is only a question of time with the lower limb.”

“But how was it?” said Huldah, questioning the great joy.

“Have you not wondered what I wanted so often with the man from the Polytechnic and his battery?”

“I thought it was only an amusement.”

“No; electricity is a comparatively old paralytic remedy, it is such a natural cure for torpidity; but most medical writers say that it has disappointed them, because, as I think, they expected too much,—forgetting that there must be a reserve of force to keep the machine going; that it is not enough to set it in motion. There the hydropaths’ remedy comes in; their salt-water baths remove the debility which makes the shock impotent. I combined the two, with the rather daring experiment of

ice on the cerebellum, where the root of the mischief lay. That is all. I charged Simmonds to keep our doings secret, because I was so afraid of failing, and I could not have borne the sight of your suspense. Now, tell the children; they will be wondering what our opposition duet is about."

How they rejoiced and triumphed over the regained five fingers! Their joy was almost tearful, till the doctor led Ted off into a discussion on magnetism and hydro-pathy, coming back to the announcement of his purpose of devoting the restored right hand to the writing of an exhaustive treatise on epilepsy in all its forms, the proceeds to be given to the new Hospital for Paralysis.

"That will be my work and pleasure," said the doctor, "and I mean to send my nurses on a tour of London sights, to get the sick-room fluff out of their brains. Do you heed, little Luigia? you are to take this wild African of ours to some of those diversions for which you are always having tickets sent you."

"An art life does seem to be a kind of 'open sesame' for everything in London," said Ted; "happily, too, we need these aids to culture. Any innocent pleasure is culture, I think, even in the highest sense; what is heaven but the perfect development of our capacities of enjoyment?"

"You do not mean exactly that, I know," said Luigia; "or, rather, that is only part of what you mean. Will you take me to my pet place to-morrow evening?"

"What is that?"

"The dear old Botanical Gardens, so deliciously un-botanical, except for the funny little corner that I used to think was the kitchen-garden of the officials."

"The first walk we ever had together was round there

in the Park—don't you remember?—when we played with boats, and you thought me such a brave piece of stolidity ; whereas, I was quaking with fear all the time. There had been a report that a cobra-di-capella had somehow got loose from the Zoological Gardens ; a snake in the grass was always my form of bogey. We will go to the other gardens, as you say, to-morrow."

" And where shall your pleasure-seeking be ? " said the doctor to Huldah.

" Here," she said, taking the restored hand in hers, and smiling at her husband, with a look that said the world would be full for her if it held nought but him.

With the quickened sense of enjoyment that came naturally in the renewal of the home brightness and with their possession of each other, Ted and Luigia prolonged their promised ramble ; watching the twilight fall, as they sat in the turf shades of the quiet gardens, making discoveries in that El Dorado, each other's nature.

There had been a flower-show the day before, and as they came out of one of the small gates, they found a waggon-load of plants being packed to go away. Stooping among the wheels was a little, solitary girl, eagerly gathering a few dropped blossoms.

" How I should like to give her a nosegay ! " said Luigia.

Ted asked the man in charge if he could sell them a few flowers.

" I daresay I might, sir ; they will drop, many of them, before I get home. You would not mind them being rather overblown perhaps," the man replied, with the gentle courtesy which seems somehow to distil from flowers on all who have the care of them.

" No, I don't suppose that will matter much. Put in a bud or two, if you can."

The bunch was gathered, and handed to the child, who, after one eager, wondering look at the donors, sat down there in the dust, and, laying the bright blooms against her breast, kissed them over and over, so lightly that not a petal drooped, yet with a passionate joy akin to that of a mother over her babe. "My beauties, my beauties," was all she said, till the gardener, playfully shaking down a cloud of rose-leaves over her, seemed to break the happy dream. With a sudden flush of tears, she rose and said, "I never said 'Thank you'; they seemed to come from heaven."

"So they did," said Ted, "from the sun and the rain; never mind our share in the matter."

The child picked up a fallen rose-leaf, and saying softly to Luigia, "Please kiss me, just once, for me to remember," laid the leaf upon her lips, as she raised them, appealingly.

Luigia bent to the little face, and Ted said, smilingly, "The new lip-salve; did you put the rose-leaf on your, lips to make them pink, little girl?"

"No, to make us equal, the lady and me; I am poor, father keeps a shop."

"Mine did once," said Ted, with some vague notion of consolation.

The little speech had sounded pathetic in its childish, proud humility; but the face bent over the flowers was radiant.

After strolling through the Inner Circle, they came upon her again, standing still, looking over the bridge that crossed the ornamental water.

"Thinking, childie?" said Luigia, touching the little bare shoulder that was thrust up, in the intentness of study.

"This is my beauty-place. I brought the flowers to see it—look!"

She pointed to a tiny, green island, fringed with feathery willows that swayed to and fro in the softly babbling water; then laid her face down again upon the bridge rail, shutting herself in, as it were, with a wall of roses. They left her there, standing gazing, gazing, as the moon came up and lit the "beauty-place" with weird, dreamy light, till the deep roar of the city might have been wind in forest trees.

"Poor little maiden!" said Ted; "I wonder whether any people ever thirsted for beauty as a Londoner does. The Greeks had the same love; but with them it was continually brought out, nursed, and fed: with a Londoner, a poor Londoner, it is kept alive by sheer force of vitality."

"Dom Edouardo?" said Luigia, presently.

"Well, Queridita?"

"Did you not have a letter from your Portuguese friend, the commandant, this morning?"

"You knew the postmark? Yes, he wrote to offer me a similar appointment to that I held under Sir Charles Durnston."

"You will not accept it?" Luigia's face had blanched.

"No, that is why I did not mention the letter; it seemed like troubling you needlessly."

"One divines such things somehow. I began to be afraid that we were too happy."

"You dear little goose! as if any one could be that."

She laid her face against his arm, and said "It is nice to be scolded. I think I should like to have been very naughty, and to have you forgive me."

"Lovers' quarrels, eh? But I do not believe in them.

If I did quarrel with any one I loved, I think I could never forgive them."

"Why?"

"The hurt would go so deep."

Ted's earnestness was almost tragic—even then.



CHAPTER XX.

PLOTS.

HE Delaureaux were visiting Sir Wiliam Mabington.

Monsieur Delaureau was a philosopher of the gentle, harmless school, whose views of Providence are exclusively of the paternal, not to say maternal order. He held, seriously, that the tail of the cat was constructed with a view to its amusement while a kitten, and that a mouse enjoyed the fun of being chased, just as a child will laugh on being run after ; entirely omitting to notice that the child's laughter is partly hysterical, and would cease altogether were the pursuer an animal of a different kind. According to him, the one law of the universe was that of a Dutch kitchen—tranquility ; and the whole world was given over to the powers that eat. Nevertheless. Monsieur Delaureau was a thinker, and had a theory of his own concerning the Caspian Sea, that insoluble problem, on which he was wont to affirm that “ Humboldt, the graydest mahn who ayvare leeved, brooke his head.” To illustrate this theory to Sir William, he went one day

to a mighty iron store near the Thames, seeking a siphon of peculiar construction.

It happens sometimes in London that the wind seems to get tangled among the streets, and suddenly rises to a whirlwind ; one of these, wheeling round, seized a large iron gate that was leaning against the warehouse wall, and blew it down upon Monsieur Delaureau, who was in the doubly-dazed state of a foreigner and a philosopher. He fell, and lay prostrate ; the heavy iron had struck him on the forehead, and, though help came immediately, the kindly old savant closed his eyes, and died, murmuring “*Ma pauvre Henriette !*”

In his pocket-book they found the address of Sir William Mabington, so the sorrowful burden was carried there.

The two dissimilar characters had become sincerely attached to each other, and Sir William’s grief took the wholesome English form of practical kindness to the survivors. There was nothing to call for Madame Delaureau’s immediate return to Brussels, and, weakened by the shock of her husband’s death, she shrank from crossing the roughened September sea, so it was arranged that she and her niece should remain Sir William’s guests till the spring, when he would have business in Belgium, and could escort them there.

Madame Delaureau was somewhat like a dried Normandy pippin ; sound and good throughout, but a little flavourless, which perhaps was one reason why everything she did seemed to possess the essence of propriety. Even her widow’s grief, after the first horror had passed, was by no means oppressive ; but there was a special cause for this last, which no one knew.

Monsieur’s last sigh of “*Ma pauvre Henriette !*” had

been treasured by the man who heard it, and transmitted to her, through Sir William, but—Madame's name was not Henriette but Mathilde, and she, having never heard her husband mention this other name, had fastened on it with a smouldering jealousy which burned away her sorrow. Yet it was a little hard that, after thirty years of faithful love, one word should condemn him ; it was such a simple matter too, if she had but known. Henriette had been Monsieur's first love, but she had died at twelve years old, through falling from a tree when they two were beech-nut gathering in the forest near Waterloo. It was most natural that when he was dying from a similar accident, his wandering thoughts should fix on this first grief of his youth, in that retrospective flash which so often precedes death. But Madame did not know, and so she misjudged her lost Émile, with a cruelty and unreason far beyond that of those old enemies of hers who had failed to recognise him as the greatest man in Belgium.

Thérèse van Heil was to remain with her uncle's widow, because she had no other home ; a circumstance which she hoped to remedy before they left London ; for, among other presumed English ideas which she had acquired in the course of frequent visits, was this, that a *mariage de convenance* was best secured by the young lady's own arrangement.

Like most of the present generation in Brussels, Thérèse was, in effect, French ; but, under her French quickness of apprehension and liking or disliking, there lay a Flemish tenacity and concentrativeness which caused her aversions to take the dangerous form of hate. To this, though not deliberately, her little cousin, Jérôme, had fallen a victim. The two were alone when he swallowed the plum-stone which caused his death.

To punish him for some childish naughtiness, in fact for being the pet of the household, she let him suffer for the few precious moments when help might have availed ; when that came, it was too late. For a while this event sobered her, but only for so long as the desolate parents remained angry at what they deemed her carelessness. She had not sufficient depth of nature for self-condemnation, and, as Ted had once said, "she had no more feeling than a fish." She spoke English perfectly well now, save when some pretty little inversion occurred to her, but her Flamande accent, semi-nasal, semi-guttural, rendered her speech the least attractive thing about her ; and some dim consciousness of this made her, rather ostentatiously, disclaim the *rôle* of a brilliant talker, trusting rather to smiles and glances, and little whispered sentences, which, just because they were whispered, seemed as though they must have something in them. She was wont to affirm, especially before gentlemen, that she was not intellectual ; and this was true. Foolish, but not simple, with propensities instead of principles, and no passions save vanity and hate,—this was the woman who had set herself to fascinate the honest English gentleman whom she styled the Baron de Mabington.

It would be simply nauseating to track Mademoiselle through her various processes of enchantment. She had thrown off French propriety without acquiring English delicacy, and would certainly have disgusted where she meant to charm, but that her one talent was skilful flattery, and that she was aided by a fair, pink and white face, whose very lack of expression gave it an air of innocence to a middle-aged man like Sir William. Her contemporaries distrusted and disliked her; especially Ted, whose distaste was doubtless intensified by the fact,

that for a few weeks she had once succeeded in beguiling him.

In revenge for what she still resented as his desertion, and in order to distract Luigia's attention from her designs, Thérèse determined to separate the two young lovers, whose mutual relation she had speedily discovered. One of her unreasoning aversions had long ago fastened upon Luigia, as a petted child, and had deepened as the object of it grew into a distinguished woman. Of the many weak motives urging her to secure Sir William, one of the liveliest was the knowledge that Luigia would be deeply pained by her success.

It was significant of her nature, that Thérèse, though a much fiercer Romanist than Signor Gondio, was troubled by none of his scruples as to marrying a Protestant ; all matters of conscience she regarded as the business of her father confessor, turning them over to him for arrangement as coolly as she would a dress to a dressmaker, but with more indifference. Her matrimonial intentions were not likely, however, to come before her spiritual director for some time yet ; Thérèse never took anything but accomplished facts to the confessional. Probabilities, motives, and feelings she avoided as completely as if she had been a Protestant muscular Christian, brought up with a healthy dislike to self-analysis and introspection.

But, though all things were apparently smooth to Mademoiselle, on the principle that an elephant's thick foot is unretarded by standing corn or fragile flowers, yet, in her discourse to her one confidential friend, the looking-glass, it appeared that there was some obstacle somewhere. "I wonder," she mused, "whether Jules could interfere ; it is strange never to have heard of him since he left me, on the very morning after too. What

could have taken him away? *Mon pauvre!* I almost wish even now, that he would appear. How that detestable little Mademoiselle Rameau would hate having to address me as Madame la Princesse. *Grand Dieu!* I never remembered before she has the same name as Jules: I hope they are not related, I would not risk being connected with her, to be always contrasted, not for anything."

One day, Thérèse slightly sprained her ankle, and Sir William came, at her request, to invite Luigia to luncheon. When the two returned, they found her arranged on a lounge as becomingly as possible, with a profusion of pale blue draperies throwing up her dazzling fairness and artificially darkened eyebrows and eyelashes. But Thérèse made one grand mistake. She sat always as though she was being photographed, with an unchanging smile—a smile that might have been becoming when first studied, but which constant usage had strained almost to a distortion. In her fear of wrinkles, she kept her face so still, that it lost the varying light and shade with nature had intended to relieve its soft insipidity.

As Sir William appeared, she held out her hand to him, and, pointing to the injured ankle, said, "It hurts so," with such a pretty affectation of childish pettishness, that Luigia was scarcely surprised to see him stoop and kiss the little foot. But it was a pitiful sight for one who had always respected bluff Sir William, and loved him as Cecil's father. Hitherto, his life, in its simple dignity, had been so harmonious, that a false passage in it now seemed doubly painful.

But, happily, Sir William Mabington had not much time for dalliance; at this moment he was called away, though not on very important business; only a little Irish boy who had come to say that "the parish would not

give his mother relief, though his honour had told them to." It happened that on this occasion the parish authorities were right, and Sir William wrong; but of course he did not know this, and, angry that his representations had been disregarded, he bustled off, child in hand. Luigia and Thérèse watched the two contrasting figures as they crossed the square. Sir William, portly and easy, with that independent bearing which, alas! springs partly from good feeding; his small companion shuffling along as best he might, hampered by his nondescript garb—a woman's petticoat, over which was buttoned a man's coat, of that irrepressibly comical cut which the tailors call swallow-tail; crowning all, a shock of unmistakable Irish hair, hair that radiated from the poll in independent tufts, each fiercely proclaiming that any attempt at brushing or parting would be incompatible with "justice to Ireland." The little figure, with its coat-tails dragging in the dust, was at once ludicrous and mournful. Even Thérèse smiled, and Luigia's eyes filled; apropos to which, or to something else, Thérèse said, "What a passion you have for children!"

"Yes," said Luigia; "up to seven years old, I think every child is irresistible, at least for a little while; they rather destroy their own poetry if one has them long together."

"Monsieur, my uncle, used to say that it saw pitiful to see the love which old maids have for children."

"I thought old maids were a British institution."

"Oh, he was speaking of the good Sisters; he did not use that phrase precisely, but I was thinking of you."

"I am not such a very old maid," said Luigia, with a smile that could afford to be good-tempered.

"Not yet, but your profession would bar your marriage

into any family of position, would it not? and Monsieur and Madame Murray would not permit you to accept a singer."

"I have not considered the subject," said Luigia, with an air that dismissed the matter.

But Thérèse was incapable of being quenched; she went on:

"Monsieur Vindon—"

At the name Luigia gave an involuntary start, and Mademoiselle continued, with a satisfied smile:

"Mr. Vindon said that he had proposed to himself to persuade you to resign your profession, but, as that was impossible because of his poverty and your self-will, he was only waiting an opportunity to disengage himself."

Luigia was silent in answer to this speech, not choosing to enter into a discussion, and calm in the certainty that, whatever Ted might think, he would not choose Mademoiselle van Heil for a confidante.

As though she divined this feeling, Thérèse added, "It was not to me that he spoke; he was consulting Sir William, and I was present of course."

The "of course" was given with a little triumphant simper, intended to intimate her prospective dignity as Lady Mabington.

Luigia, coerced by the necessity of saying something, asked, "What was Sir William's opinion?" and waited, impatiently, for a reply, whose improbability might disprove the whole.

"Oh, he tried to persuade Monsieur Vindon to be patient; he said that his son Cecil would have married you under any circumstance."

At this seemingly inopportune moment Sir William returned; having suddenly remembered that to-day not

being a vestry day, it would be better to wait, taking care that his *protégés* should not starve meanwhile. He came straight to Luigia, saying, "I quite forgot, I was charged to give you this."

It was an order to view a private library, a rare collection, in which there was some ancient MS. music which Luigia had been anxious to see.

"How kind," she said mechanically, "when they have never seen me!"

"Mademoiselle thinks that to see her is to love her," whispered Thérèse to Sir William.

"She would not be far wrong if she did think so," he answered, ready to do battle for his old favourite, even against the enchantress. Cecil had loved Luigia.

Thérèse pouted, and said, "I never found her so irresistible."

"Ah, that is because you are jealous of her; one pretty girl always is of another."

Thérèse was not altogether displeased with the blunt, good-natured reply; though it set their beauty on a level, it compensated for that by doing the same for their ages. A Continental girl of twenty-five, she found it soothing to regard herself as contemporary with this English girl of twenty.

While this was passing, Luigia had been reading the courteous note accompanying the order. She said now, "I think, if mademoiselle will excuse me, I will use this at once; it would be nearer than coming from home."

"I will come with you, and show you the best way," said Sir William, to Thérèse's chagrin and Luigia's satisfaction.

As soon as they were clear of the house, she said, "Has Mr. Vindon been consulting you?"

The little hand trembling on his arm stirred Sir William's sympathies ; with a face of grave concern, he looked down at her, and said, " Yes, my child, and I scarcely knew what advice to give that should be good for you both."

Luigia did not answer ; she could not.

Presently, Sir William said, " You must not be angry with him for speaking to me first ; he was so anxious to save you pain."

" I think sometimes anger saves one's heart from breaking," she said then ; and they were silent till the end of their short journey, when, holding out her hand, she bade her old friend " Good-bye," with, unconsciously, the air of one whose life is closing.

" Space to think—if I could but get space to think," moaned Luigia, when she found herself alone in the pleasant quiet library.

Something seemed to be pressing on her brain, so that it could not work. It was with an agony of impatience that she looked up as a maid entered and said, " My lady left word, ma'am, that if she did happen to be out when you came, she hoped you would be comfortable, and that this would not be your last visit; can I get anything?"

" No, thank you," said Luigia, with a dreaminess which the servant took for studious abstraction, and was awed by accordingly ; she silently placed writing materials, and left the room.

Luigia leant back in her chair, and thought.

Throughout the conversation with Thérèse, she had been so absolutely confident in Ted's truth and Mademoiselle's falsehood, that Sir William's confirmatory sentence had, for a while, stunned her. She felt dazed,

bewildered, blinded, as though she were awaking from a long illness, out of date with her world.

Her art, in which she had so rejoiced and gloried, had grown into a stigma, a disgrace ; her love, Ted, on whom she had reposed in the delicious safety of perfect union—he, discussing plans for ridding himself of her, before Thérèse van Heil, and with Sir William Mabington ! who, with all his excellencies, was the last person she, notwithstanding their old friendship, would have chosen as an arbiter in any case involving refinements of feeling.

The Ted of old, the chivalrous Dom Edouardo, as she had styled him, would never have done this thing ; but this new Ted, whom she did not know, might do anything. Then, like the whisper of a fiend, came the thought that as an artist he had undoubtedly sunk, and it might be that his whole nature, being lowered, had developed an unhealthy fastidiousness. “Cecil would have married you, in any case,” Thérèse had said, quoting Sir William. “Ay, truly—Oh ! Cecil, darling, if you had but been my brother, and I had died with you !”

Then Luigia grew indignant. Thérèse’s virus was sending its evil through her soul. If Ted wished for his freedom, he should have it ; she would tell him so—no, she would write—at once. He had gone to Dulwich for a few days on some business connected with his drawing-class ; she could post the letter in returning home.

Murmuring, “I suppose, if one has to sign one’s own death-warrant, it is only natural to do it quickly,” she took a sheet of note-paper, and wrote :

“ Dear friend, I am sorry that my vocation should disgust you. I agree with you that all connection between us had better cease.”

As she folded the little note the coronet at the top of the page reminded her of what she had forgotten,—it was that of Lord Harry Varne, the owner of the library, and —the purchaser of that ill-fated picture of Ted's.

He, Ted, might recognise it ; she would not risk reminding him of that time, with its poignant suffering and exquisite joy ; besides, she had a superstitious feeling that the little sheet, with its ill-omened associations, might work him harm. Hastily tearing it up, she wrote the same words on a card of her own, and enclosed it in an envelope, which she had in her pocket-book.

Just then Lady Varne came in from riding; her cordial young face seeming almost startling, in contrast with the gloomy shadows that had been peopling the room.

She was not beautiful, except for the soft fair hair, now resting in pleasant relief against the purple black of her habit, but she had the bright, innocent look of what she was—a happy wife and mother.

"I am so glad to find you here," she said to Luigia. "Do you know, I made your acquaintance long ago ? Dr. Heine gave me lessons once, and whenever I was particularly stupid, he used to say ' Go and hear Miss Rameau ; she can show you where I can only tell you ? Have you found what you wanted ? '

"I could scarcely fail to do that here," said Luigia, with an admiring glance at the rows of white vellum-bound MSS. which she had been so anxious to see, and now had never opened.

"Ah ! you appreciate these ; they are lost upon us, after the fashion of inherited treasures. If they had been paintings now, my husband would have been happy ; but perhaps one of his sons may be a musician ; no one can tell what a baby may be." The glad young mother spoke

in a tone implying the happy conviction that, whatever direction her baby's development took, it would be to perfection. "Would you like to see my boy?" she added.

Luigia very sincerely said "Yes," and "Baby's bell" was rung. While they waited, she said, "I have been wasting the note-paper," with what seemed to Lady Varne such a droll gravity of penitence, that she received the confession with a little soft peal of laughter. Then "Baby" appeared, flushed and dignified from his morning nap, but he seemed to approve of Luigia, for, from his throne in his mother's arms, he smiled down at her, that frank, recognising, baby smile which confers a patent of nobility in the estimation of the mother.

"You see," said Lady Varne, "Baby has fallen in love with you at once, the rogue; so you must come and see him again."

Luigia murmured thanks and adieux, and left them standing there, happy mother and happy child! while she passed out into the bare and dusty street, and, as though she had been widowed long years ago, wondered what such blissful lives could feel like.

But she posted her letter.



CHAPTER XXI.

A RAINBOW.

LUIGIA sat at the piano, playing and musing ; only yesterday, at this time, she had been listening to Thérèse, wondering tranquilly that she should expect to be believed. Now —well, by now, her letter had reached Ted.

Was he thinking of it ? Perhaps not ; it might be that he had put it away with only a feeling of relief at the ease of his release ; but, no, Ted was not, could not, be so changed as to be glad that he had left her, the weaker one, to bear this cruel blow in the dark,—he would be ashamed, sorry. Then, with the undying instinct of love, Luigia began to grieve over his sorrow ; to long to lessen it, to wish that he stood there then, with his hand in hers that she might comfort him, as the dying do their friends, with a whispered “Do not grieve, the pain will cease.”

Yesterday she had been angry, but that was past ; she had not learnt to nurse wrath ; hers had been no life of wrong, and slight, and injury ; no one had ever been unkind to her, except, long ago, her father ; and her one feeling

towards him was fear. So now this frail gourd of anger which had grown up yesterday to shield her pain, was withered in a night, and she stood defenceless, with, alas ! no dignity in her attitude ; Luigia had none for those, the few, she loved.

In this our old, old world, there are not many states of feeling without their special exponent. Rousseau, the unhappy, has, in music at least, written the thoughts of clinging, wounded souls like Luigia's ; instinctively she began playing over one of his "Consolations,"—the three-note air, which, perhaps from its extreme simplicity, had been the only one of all her mother's songs to linger in her childish memory. Softly the words came to her lips, and she sang

"Que le jour me dure—
Quand tu n'y viens pas."

"Mais, je viens toujours, moi," sang another, deeper voice, in a musical undertone, a voice she would know in heaven—Ted's. He had come behind her, and now, raising her face to his, said, with a playfulness that was more than half-mournful, "What do you think you deserve for sending me such a letter ?" Then, in a tone that sounded like the last echo of an organ, he said, "Let us be happy, sweet, while we can ; for we must part, though not utterly. When your letter came I knew that I had been wrong in not telling you at once, but it was only two days ago that I knew, and you had to sing in the evening ; I was afraid."

"Tell me—" she said, trying to withdraw herself from his protecting arms, but he drew her back again, saying :

"It is nothing terrible or tragic, dearest ; it has not even that dignity ; just one of those hard, material necessities which come upon us sometimes. I must have a

nest for my bird. I cannot be so patient as I thought I could, and this teaching is wretched work. Sir Charles Durnston has written to offer me a year's appointment, one of the lucrative order, and I have accepted it."

"But the painting?" said Luigia, to whom Ted the artist was as precious as Ted the man, which was one of the many reasons why he loved her so.

"That will not suffer; they have, somehow, let the damp get to those pictures of mine, and want me to restore them: the very thing for me, going over the old work may bring back my hand's lost cunning."

"Anything for that."

"Brave, my lady; she will dismiss her knight right valiantly."

"How could you forgive my letter?"

"I divined its origin. Thérèse van Heil was present when I was consulting Sir William as to the reliable quality of Sir Charles's brilliant presages; we did not notice her at first, and then he said it did not matter, she was too honourable to listen. What did she say?"

Luigia repeated the words, which had burnt into her memory too deeply for any omission. His face darkened, and he said, with that deep scorn which was Ted's deepest form of anger, "Thérèse is a cleverer woman than I thought her: I did say that my wife must not work, and Sir William said that Cecil would never have found out where the money came from."

"Two years," said Luigia, dolefully; but this in fact seemed little after the Apollyon she had been fighting, a shape with no definite outlines, and therefore apparently gigantic; only, because she was a woman and perverse, and because she was vexed that he had found her singing those words of longing, she said, "Mind, I will

not have you bound to me for those two years ; we are not betrothed."

"As you will," he said, gravely ; "it will make no difference in me ; if we were never to marry, I should be yours till I died."

"And I should die without you," she said, resting her face upon his hand, with a dainty humility she kept for him.

Busily talking, they had not noticed a storm gather ; now the darkness made them look out, to see a dome, night-black, save where the sulphurous-tinted clouds waited to discharge their electricity. Suddenly, a white line shot down from the zenith, seeming to split the blackness, and remaining for an instant absolutely still, like a rift in a curtain, or a chink in the dark wall, through which heaven seemed to shine ; then it vanished, the sky closed again, and there followed a crash of thunder, rattling like near musketry.

"It is fearfully beautiful," said Luigia.

"You look lit up, as though it suited you," said Ted.

"Yes, one of the first things I can remember is an old lady rebuking me for rejoicing at a storm. I have always had a dim, confused feeling that the elements were kin, and their rough play a thing to sympathise with exultantly. Look at those great rain-drops, like the weeping of some giant child, who in his sport had killed his mortal playfellow."

The rain poured on, a heavy, stormy rain, and they drew near the window to watch it ; then they saw, in the street below, a solitary figure, a woman. She was well dressed, but had no umbrella, and seemed to be looking for a cab, but there was none in sight ; presently, she

crossed the road, as though to seek the shelter of the doctor's doorway; half-way across her foot slipped on a loose stone, and she fell.

"Poor woman!" said Ted; "shall I send one of the maids to ask her in, and rub down her dress?"

"Stay," said Luigia, "you do not know who it is."

"Who is it?"

"Madame Rameau, Lulu's mother, you remember? we wrote and told you about her."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I had been wondering where I had seen her; just before she fell she looked up, and then I remembered her. Perhaps some one else may come to her assistance."

But no one did, and they stood watching the poor lady, making feeble, trembling efforts to cleanse her dress, till Luigia said, "Really, it is only common humanity; we must ask her in, people will think she is intoxicated."

Luigia rang, and desired the servant to go and ask the lady outside if she would like to come in and wait, while they sent for a cab for her.

The servant, an old one, who had come back to Dr. Murray's family on their return to town, took the privilege of old servants, and looked a sulky protest against taking people in from the street; but Luigia added, "If you please, Harriet," which, from her, was equivalent to an imperious ultimatum. So the grim domestic obeyed; returning presently, with a mollified face, to report "a nice-spoken lady, who would like to thank her kind friends; says she's is come from Paris; they do say them foreigners are particular about thanking folks."

Harriet seemed inclined to run on, like a learned com-

mentary. In the first pause, Luigia said, "Did you tell my aunt?"

"Yes, miss, but she wants the young lady she saw from the street. You know, Miss Luigia, I used to tell you long ago it was not proper to go to the window in London."

"And I used to say that it was hard not to be allowed to look at the sky, when it was the only beautiful thing to be seen," Luigia answered smilingly, as she left the room; the gaunt serving-woman following her, with one of those loving, admiring looks that usually followed, and atoned for, what she called the liberty of her scoldings.

Luigia was prepared for a somewhat embarrassing interview, but not for the astounding blunder which, it appeared, had brought Madame Rameau to the house.

Ever since her separation from her husband, Madame, it seemed, had been possessed by the idea that he would marry again. She knew nothing of the removal of Dr. Murray and his family from Hendon, but business having brought her to London, where she believed Rameau to be, she had been constantly on the alert for some traces of him.

Confused by the storm, she had lost her way, wandered into Gwynne Street and recognised Luigia at the window. Perceiving, indistinctly, that a gentleman stood by her, who was too tall for the doctor, she had remembered Rameau's, to her, inexplicable interest in Luigia, and, jealousy quickening her thoughts, had leaped at once to the conclusion that this was him, that he and Luigia were married, and that this was their house. With a confused, angry notion of beating at the door and claiming her husband, she had crossed the road, and in so doing fallen down.

The fall, and the kindness proffered from the obnoxious house, had cooled her passion ; but she retained her idea, and Luigia, at first, unconsciously confirmed it; being naturally a little reluctant to declare the precise relationship in which she stood to her companion at the window, and chiefly occupied in resolving to obey her maid's directions as to street-surveying for the future.

When at length Madame Rameau made her comprehend that she was supposed to have married her own father, she was so confounded that Huldah was obliged to come in, with a clear statement of the truth : that Luigia was Rameau's daughter by a former marriage ; and that they never saw him, he having resigned all claim to her years ago, in favour of her aunt Huldah—Mrs. Murray. Perhaps Madame found it mortifying to be so suddenly deprived of her heroics, or she was annoyed at having perpetrated such a piece of bathos. She took leave, rather unceremoniously for one whose habits, though not her birth, were, as Harriett said, “a kind of French.”

With the slightest of apologies, and most languid of thanks, she hastened away, and did not return.

“She has gone in the rain after all,” said Huldah, as she, too, left the room.

“Too thoroughly damped, apparently, to be afraid of rain,” said Ted.

“I am so grieved,” said Luigia.

“Why, dear heart? I should say that is a lady who, whatever she may have been formerly, is now quite capable of taking care of herself.”

“I did not mean,—I meant so sorry to mix you, Ted, up with such a wretched family connection—to give you such a father-in-law.”

"Well, as to that I think we are about equal—you have a father who is not producible, and I an aunt who, I sincerely hope, never may be."

"But yours is not like direct descent. I wonder—oh so often!—how much of my father's nature I have inherited; whether I, too, may be, without knowing it, false, and mean, and cruel."

"You dearest of fair lunatics, what neat little delusion do you mean to conjure up for yourself next?"

"It is not too pleasant a phantasy."

"As pleasant as true; do you not remember what that old lady said of you, the other night, at Sir William's?"

"No, what?"

"Ah, perhaps you did not hear. You had been singing "Voi che sapete,"—some one had asked for it; this old lady—I don't know who she was—turned to me, and said, 'If Miss Rameau's nature is as much like an angel's as her voice is, she must be a good child.' I could have embraced the dear soul, though her bare shoulders were something terrible to contemplate."

"People are never sincere in those glib compliments."

"Sometimes they are; nobody cultivates polished speeches now, you know, so that smooth sentences are more likely to be impromptu than abruptness. Besides, people, especially old people, cannot simulate wet eyelashes."

"If she was true, her remark was not."

"What, that you are a good child?"

"I think I am like the day, gloomy," said Luigia, trying to rally.

"Like the day? I accept the simile; see,—"

In spite of her previous resolutions, she was drawn to the window.

While she had been sorrowing, the clouds had broken, and now, on the darkest of them all, there shone a rainbow; that fairest, brightest sight in all creation, the perfection of form wedded to the perfection of colour.

"How glorious!" said Luigia, with a deep breath of appreciation; "but yours is the faith, to you belongs the sign."

Even as she spoke, under the one dazzling arch, as though sheltered by it, appeared another.

"A double rainbow! a double rainbow!" shouted a little street boy, throwing up his ragged cap in delight.

As the rainbow faded the cloud also melted away, leaving the clear, bright blue; the setting sun, which they could not see, began to throw his many colours across the sky. One by one, like a broken army, the clouds fled before him, dying as he was; and as they fled he changed the smoke-cloud into a golden glory, the nimbus into a rock of amethyst; then all vanished—the sun, and the cloud, and the glory, and there remained an infinite purple dome, lit with diamond points; and Luigia said:

"The night exceeds the morning, and the end of a day is better than the beginning."

"Yes," said Ted, "because *l'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.*"

"And we shall have the winter together," said Luigia—a remark which was not so inconsequent as it appeared to be; "you will not sail till the spring."

"No, and then two springs more, and we will begin to enact that old rhyme you used to sing to your doll."

"What was that?"

"Together, together, blow hot or blow cold,
We'll never be sorry, and never grow old."



CHAPTER XXII.

DR. HEINE'S PARTY.

NOW and then Dr. Heine gave a musical conversazione, enlivened by dancing. So said his daughters, as a round-about euphuism for a ball, which word they declared to be as obsolete as rout. Seven motherless girls, they had a good many pronounced opinions amongst them, and it was sometimes as much as even the father could do to hold his own.

Dr. Heine's parties were generally pleasant; a successful man himself, he had naturally the habit of drawing round him successful men, and these have one family virtue, which, though not one of the heroic, is certainly one of the most desirable socially—namely, good temper. As, too, the successes of his friends were generally the result of mental or kindred natural gifts, there was seldom lacking that charming spice of originality which belongs to clever people, and gives a wonderful relishing flavour to mixed society.

It must be confessed that there were also some less harmonious features. The Mus. Doctor wisely cultivated

not only those who were distinguished, but those who were likely to become so ; and these having started in all sorts of positions in the social scale, and not having as yet had their angles rubbed off by attrition with civilised suavity, were wont to be rather a curious study in point of manners.

It was not absolutely unheard of at Dr. Heine's soirées for a gentleman to be suddenly reported as missing, and discovered to have gone home indignant, on the supposition that somebody had insulted his boots.

It happened once, the doctor having been among the last to retain the ghastly fashion of life-size plaster figures holding the staircase lights, that an honest, solemn young Welshman, fresh caught from the quarries, was scared away before he reached the drawing-room, and, mistaking Niobe for the Virgin Mary, fled in righteous terror from what he considered "a house of Papist idols."

To one of these gatherings Luigia and Ted were invited about this time, and went ; meeting there an old friend, Luigia said a dear, old friend, in Signor Gondio, who had been visiting Italy, whence he had hurriedly returned to England, they little guessed why.

In Rome he had met an old fellow-student, now a monk ; the two had forgotten one another for years, and would probably do so again, but while they were together the embers of their old boyhood's friendship quickened into warmth, and, just because they were not likely to meet again, each was more confidential with the other than he was wont to be with any one.

Frá Giuseppe related certain grievances received at the hands of a powerful superior, and Signor Gondio one evening just before they parted asked his friend's opinion

as to whether it would be lawful for him, as a true son of the Church, to wed a Protestant.

"Assuredly," said Brother Giuseppe, with the confidence of one who had studied that, among other semi-ecclesiastical questions ; "the woman is the weaker, she may be converted."

"I could make no effort for that," said Signor Gondio ; "to me, the lady we speak of seems perfect ; she is devout, in her own fashion, and I would not have her gentle nature tortured by those doubts which almost exceed the strength of a man's youth."

"Well, even then I think you would be justified ; the world is growing wider ; here, in Rome, at any rate, we cannot believe that there is no salvation out of the Church."

It is not the practice of Rome to cultivate a personal conscience ; if the Church does not disapprove, that is enough for the most scrupulous of her sons ; so, in this case, Holy Church having given her sanction in the person of Brother Giuseppe, Signor Gondio hastened home, with bright visions of Love and Hope travelling beside him.

"Too late !" was the fiat which met him, even on this evening.

Ted and Luigia were not exactly of the class which does its love-making in public ; but eyes will speak, and if theirs had been ever so well controlled, Huldah's, resting upon them, would alone have been a betrayal.

Among the Signore's ancestors was a noble whom one of the Borgias had caused to be poisoned on his wedding morning. Quietly he had drawn his cloak over his face, to cover its contortions of agony, and, with his head upon his young wife's lap, had died while she thought him sleeping.

Wisely or unwisely, the habit of hiding their wounds had become hereditary in the family, and the Signore had it in full. Not Luigia herself could have told that he had a feeling kept back: only, by-and-by, there came into his opera, which he had at length resumed, a new character—the nephew of Boadicea's husband; loving her so hopelessly that it was scarcely guiltily, but at length transformed from lover to friend by the purity of her nobleness, which saw not, because it would not see.

For this evening, he escaped into a little knot of young men, mostly pupils of Dr. Heine's, among whom, oddly enough, Miss Rameau's religion came into discussion, thus :—

One of those large-minded men who are an undeniable bore in a special company, had got in amongst these, and so, when they would have been peacefully occupied in scandalising their absent acquaintance, he contrived to drag in the vexed question of the presumed decline of the drama, concerning which he had a neat little theory, consisting of three words, "The Brummagem Puritans."

As the Signore entered the little circle, this person was in the midst of a peroration, "Decline of the drama indeed! I tell you it is those Brummagem Puritans."

"I say, hush, Ardine," said a courtly little man, who seemed not displeased to find an excuse for stopping the tirade, "that is Miss Rameau standing there, she is one of them."

"A Puritan actress! That would be a good joke, Gusty, if there was a little more probability in it."

The gentleman addressed as Gusty, had been so named by his companions, on the principle of contrast, he being distinguished by an imperturbable tranquillity,

but his parents had called him Gustavus Augustus, with a vague notion of compensating for his paternal patronymic of Brown. He replied to Mr. Ardine with, "She is not an actress exactly, but as to the other you can ask her, if you like."

Of course, the last thing he meant or expected was to be taken at his word, but Mr. Ardine never suffered himself to be trammelled by considerations of delicacy; accordingly he accosted Luigia, saying, "Miss Rameau, Gusty here says that you are a Puritan; of course, it is too absurd to ask you to deny it."

Mr. Gusty, startled and annoyed for once, gave Luigia a deprecatory, apologetic little bow, which she accepted with a smile, but the manner of the other had that indefinable familiarity which a woman either resents as an insult, or despises as a mark of low breeding. Luigia, in this case, did both, though languidly; she quietly waited for him to repeat his question, or consider it as answered, but for Mr. Ardine to be silent from choice was an impossibility: he said, "Are you a Puritan?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

Mr. Ardine's "Oh" was so ludicrously disconcerted, that his companions laughed in spite of themselves, and, to cover his confusion, he continued, "Well, you are not at all like a canting hypocrite."

"I hope not."

Luigia's smile, as she said this, had a curious, half-hidden brightness, which lit up Mr. Ardine to some perception of things beyond him, but he had emphatically the gift of persistence, so continued, "But of all the *tusus naturæ* I ever heard of, a Puritan singer comes strongest."

"Hath not a Jew ears?" said Luigia, with a little gentle raillery.

The well-known ring of Shakespeare seemed to soothe his ruffled nerves ; he said, with an air of relief, "I dare-say we are nearer together than we seem after all ; what do you understand by a Puritan, now?"

"An old definition, given by one of themselves, is, 'One who fears God very much, and man not at all.'"

"Who said that?"

"One of Cromwell's generals, I believe."

"Oh, Cromwell ; that was a long while ago ; but I mean these,—these Brummagem Puritans," stammered Mr. Ardine, falling back upon his *pièce de résistance*, with an air of collapse. "Are you one of these now, Miss Rameau?"

"I suppose so."

"But—now I really am asking for information—isn't there more abominable balderdash talked in Exeter Hall than in all the kingdom?"

"I do not know. I have heard very queer logic in the House of Commons."

"What do you know about Parliament and logic?"

"Very little, so the fallacies must have been rather patent for me to discover them ; but I was a child at the time, and children have a keen ear for sophistry."

"How came you in the House of Commons, may one ask?"

"A friend of my uncle's, member for Maccleston, had a little son whose passion was debates, and who infected me with the same craze ; so we were smuggled in sometimes, to our great delight. There was a tiny nook that just held us, near the ladies' gallery, but distinct from it, where we used to peep out through the carving,

on grand field-nights, cool and comfortable, when all the rest of the House was crammed to squabbling point."

"A queer taste for children."

"Was it? I do not know."

"What has become of your companion Parliamentarian? you did not tell us his name."

"He is dead," said Luigia, with a quietness that dismissed the subject; she could not utter Cecil's name in that company, kindly and harmless though most of them were. Just then Mr. Ardine was called away, to accompany "Adelaida," and Luigia escaped.

"What a boor that fellow Ardine is!" said Signor Gondio, coming into the circle again; he had drawn back, lest he might have to be bound over to keep the peace of Her Majesty's dominions for such time as the law directs.

"Yes," said Mr. Gusty, "if ever Ardine gets to heaven, it will be as an accompanyist."

"Can he play?"

"Play! my dear fellow, just listen; poor Moffle's singing sets him off."

Perhaps there is only one man living who can sing "Adelaida," certainly the gentleman now essaying to do so could not. The air of maudlin imbecility which he contrived to throw over the song was something wonderful; but, for once, people listened for the sake of the accompaniment: without in the least overpowering or contending with the singer, this flowed on, true, delicate, and pure, like a real Adelaida wedded to an inebriate but living her own sweet life untainted.

The strangest part of the performance was, that the singer who failed so signally really was a young man of

tender, refined feeling, while Mr. Ardine, away from the piano, was very decidedly the reverse.

By-and-by the changes of a "Triumph" quadrille brought him, Mr. Ardine, to Luigia, as a temporary partner. He said, "You have forgotten me, Miss Rameau."

Luigia raised her eyebrows inquiringly, and asked, "Since when?"

"Years ago we were fellow-pupils of Signor Gondio's; I was a poor little choir-boy then, and I used to think you would not notice me because I was always so shabby."

The frank reference to his early beginnings touched Luigia, and she said, "I am sure it was not so," with such cordiality, that he added, "I used to think you were the prettiest little girl I had ever seen, and I retain that opinion."

"Ah!" said Luigia, relapsing at once into such languid indifference, as indicated that neither her looks nor Mr. Ardine's appreciation of them were subjects she cared to discuss.

"Confound it!" mused Mr. Ardine, "she is as cool and sweet as a strawberry ice; shouldn't I like to poke her up into a glorious passion?"

But the dance was ended, and he returned to Mr. Gusty, with whom it was partly a habit and partly a principle never to snub anybody.

Mr. Gustavus Augustus Brown was invited, as a matter of course, to most exclusive musical parties; a fact which he accounted for on the anomalous grounds that he could neither sing nor play, and so had no enemies to keep him out; but a deeper reason probably consisted in this—that he was a gentle, well-bred little man, with such an absolute incapacity for comprehending what he called

a row-quarrelous, that people seemed to be constrained to refrain from any exertion of that sort before him. Of course, such an oil-fountain was found invaluable in the midst of professional sensitiveness and jealousies. Mr. Gusty confessed to being "a little horsey in his talk, because a race was such a cheap show to a man with no money to lose," but his lazy, delicate articulation had a curious knack of giving an aristocratic savour to speeches that in themselves were rather the reverse. To strangers he was somewhat puzzling, because having had, and spent, just two hundred a-year, ever since he was ten years old, he was continually oscillating between the airs of a person of property, as he had been in his school days, and those of an absolute pauper, as he felt himself now.

Mr. Ardine coming up, with a conversational smile, Mr. Gusty remarked to him, "Jolly little girl that Miss Rameau; she never turned a hair over that Puritan business you gave her, and it was a stiff bit of fencing too. I would bet anything that little lady had a grandfather."

"How do you mean?" said Mr. Ardine.

"Why, even in a horse you don't get such training as that under two or three generations."

"I suppose, from your holding that theory, that you had a grandfather yourself."

"Yes, he was a pork-butcher," said Mr. Gusty tranquilly.

Mr. Ardine drew back, with the air of a man who had suddenly found himself, like Mrs. Kenwig's hairdresser, "beyond bakers;" but a bystander said, "What nonsense, Gusty! we all know your grandfather was the Earl of Glarivan."

"Yes, one; but people have two generally, don't they?"

I had, at any rate. The pork-butcher left me his name and his money though, so it is only natural, it seems to me, that I should care more for him than for the other noble lord, who was rather relieved than otherwise when his daughter gave him a chance to cut her, by eloping with the tutor, my father, son of the pork-butcher. Awful hard work genealogy is, even one's own ; I should think the men at the Heralds' office must toss up for people's pedigrees."

The real star of this evening was a Madame Cialdini, an aunt of Dr. Heine's, once the greatest tragedian in Europe, by reason of her deep, pathetic genius, and daring unconventionality.

Before such a light, though its available glory had vanished, Luigia felt herself an insignificant little piece of fireworks. She had never met Madame before, and was pleasantly stirred when Dr. Heine came to her, saying "My aunt wants to know you ; did you know that they call you Madame Cialdini's pet?"

"That is what she is, and shall be," said the old prima donna ; "I feel inclined to feed her with bon-bons—my little Fiorentina. She is civilised, not like one-half of your people, who come up to me with no introduction, and say, 'How do, Madame?' precisely as if I was the washerwoman of their mother."

While she spoke, Luigia looked at the ex-stage-queen, a beautiful woman. Faded, and haggard, and brown, but a beautiful woman still ; she would always be that while her magnificent eyes blazed, like ruby lamps, under the massive arch of her forehead, while the weary lines of her lips could break into a smile of such wonderful sweetness. "If only she did not rouge," thought Luigia.

With a quickness that had become an instinct, Madame

read the thought, and said, "Ah ! my child, when I was young, every one rouged everywhere ; now, I should be hideous, demoniac, without it ; but you are right not to begin ; it is fatal to the skin ; besides, these natural varying tints are such a pretty language."

She gently drew her finger down the burning cheek which Luigia had involuntarily assumed, in penitence for her criticism.

"I did not mean—I am so sorry," she stammered.

"Why apologise, you little thing? could I not see your flattering thoughts, as well as the other? Also, as people say, I take you for my pet, and pets may do anything. Do you know, you really can sing? Even poor Cinti-Damoreau never equalled your 'Robert, *toi que j'aime*' ; it is the real Princess, not the screaming beldame one hears generally."

"I am so glad," said Luigia, honestly.

"It was for those things I fell in love with you—impersonation, conception ; not for those wonderful notes that make your celebrity ; though I confess that F in altissimo is delicious."

"Ah, that F !" said Luigia, with a comical face of woe. "I have heard it discussed till I can sympathise with a poor street-tumbler, who told my uncle that he was so tired of mounting up above the people's heads, and being gaped at for it, that he was really glad when he fell and broke his leg."

"And lost his profession? that could not be pleasant to look forward to."

"I must do so, though Dr. Heine said, when I first went to him, that my voice would be gone in ten years."

"It is delicate certainly ; but all depends upon how it is used—how often you sing with a sore throat."

"That I will not do."

"So I resolved when I came out, but the first time I broke an engagement, somebody invented, and everybody believed, that I was in prison for debt ; the next time they said that I was intemperate, and was not sober enough to appear."

"Shameful !" said Luigia, indignantly ; but Madame only smiled, and said,

"Did you think there were no shameful things in the world, little one ? A singer should have a metal throat, that is all."

"Might I ask you to sing ?"

"My child, did you ever try to play on a cracked spinnet?"

"No—why ?"

"I did once, when I was a girl, and it was such an exact presentment of an old woman's voice that I vowed never to sing when more than forty years old. People believe in me now, but if they were to hear me, they would think that I had been an impostor."

"That must have been a terrible spinnet to impress you so, *mia donna*."

"It was just that—terrible ; one-half the notes were gone altogether, and gave only a wooden dub instead of tone ; the rest were cracked. Ah me !"

"But it is said, 'Madame Cialdini had exquisite notes when she ceased singing.'"

"Some—yes ; two or three remain still, they come in with goblin clearness sometimes when I sit alone and sing."

"Always alone ?"

"Ay, child, always alone,—I and my past, we sit and stare at each other ; it is desolate, just a little. I never

had a child. Did you know that I was once an English duchess?"

"No." Luigia's answer was brief, not because it was not, but because it was, sympathetic.

"Yes, my first husband was the Duke of Lenston, and—a pauper; that was why he married me, just as a speculation. It was not even a stage passion for the actress; so he told me, one month after our wedding day."

"Cruel!"

"Well, it was for his title that I accepted him. I was young then, and to be a duchess seemed—oh, heavenly!"

Her old fascination lived yet in the grand air of self-scorn with which the ex-duchess said this.

Luigia answered, "I suppose the dignity grew wearisome."

"Weary? Ah! my child, I have suffered. I was glad, too glad even to be angry, when I discovered some conduct of my husband's which divorced us. Then, after some years, I married my first love, Paolo Cialdini; such a pretty name I used to think it; but not after we were wedded. I suppose one must be *désillusionnée*; so it was, even with him; but he died, and we loved one another once. *Paolo mio*: when he was a boy, he had eyes like yours, that is why *la mia Luigia* may command me, ever."

The ex-queen of the stage was a powerful friend still, and Luigia profited by her influence more than she knew; but, while she sat at Madame Cialdini's feet, drinking in her lightest sentences as though they were the utterances of a sibyl, Dr. Heine's youngest daughter was saying, in reply to some complimentary raptures of Mr. Ardine's, "Do you like her? I think she is a horrid old thing, but she is my aunt, you know."

This Miss Heine had been somewhat puzzled to choose a *rôle* for herself, which should be at once fresh and effective ; she had decided, at length, on excessive frankness, and found, as she said, that "it did very well."

It certainly disconcerted Mr. Ardine, who, in return for a pretty speech on "these charming gatherings," received only, "Well, you see, I am at home, and the youngest, so I get nothing but stupid partners."

As the young lady was then in the act of whirling him giddy in a waltz, Mr. Ardine, whose sense of personal dignity was one of his keenest, subsided into a displeased silence, which happened to be just what his companion wished ; as she confided to a friend afterwards, "It was so horrid to go gasping round the room like a talking-fish."

The evening ended, Huldah, Luigia, and Ted were sipping their coffee at home, when Luigia said : "What became of you, Dom Edouardo ? I scarcely saw you all the evening."

"No, that is the purpose of a social gathering, to bring together the people who would not seek each other. I watched you safe under Madame Cialdini's wing, and then—tell it not in Gath—I fell asleep."

"You ? Ted !"

"Even so ; you see, I was nobody's business, neither marriageable nor musical, and so I fell upon my own hands, and entertaining oneself is not a work to be done well in company. Hearing music is soothing enough, but to talk music one need be a musician."

"Dr. Heine's youngest daughter confessed to me that the evening was a failure, as to conversation ; she said it was through the absence of some literary friends of theirs, who generally come and enliven them."

"I dare say that had something to do with it, men whose profession is thinking can generally talk, and their special subject interests everybody. I should have been lively enough, if a brother artist had turned up."

"There was not one?"

"No, unless you count Muffle; he was there, getting up young ladies' backs and head-dresses, for 'The Dairy-maid Duchess,' a story he is illustrating. He says he no more dare be a month behind the mode than a dress-maker. I advised him to take in a fashion-book."

"What did he say?"

"Embraced the idea eagerly, and asked if I would join him in a subscription to *Le Follet*. I told him yes, if he would undertake to let me have it regularly, at the Abouwiwaka Station, latitude 16° 23' south, longitude uncertain."

"How did he like that proposal?"

"He grew almost pathetically earnest over it—said he would give all he possessed to be going too. He is sick of his present work; if he makes a decent drawing, they blotch it half out in the engraving, and all the editor cares about is what he calls a fashionable pose for the figures. He seems to have some character too, of its kind, that editor. The other day Muffle had to draw an, of course, imaginary portrait of a certain royal couple; by dint of a careful study of photographs he succeeded, as he thought, capitally, but his editor exclaimed, 'My dear fellow, this won't do; you must make them catching hold of one another.' 'Catching hold of one another?' said Muffle. 'Yes,' said the other, 'joined hands, you know, and that sort of thing. Why, if we were to publish them standing apart like that, it would be all over the country that it was not a match of affection; if there is

one thing the British public insists upon, it is that husbands and wives shall be very fond of each other.'"

"Poor Mr. Moffle! he would find Africa rather refreshing. Good-night, Dom Edouardo."

"Good-night, sweetheart, dear heart, sunshine and moonlight."



CHAPTER XXIII.

THÉRÈSE WITH VARIATIONS.

SIR WILLIAM MABINGTON'S will was strong, but only in proportion to the rest of his faculties ; Thérèse van Heil was all will ; so that with her Sir William had no chance of resistance.

Yet, bewitched as he was, he had an uncomfortable perception of having been somehow "managed"—a word which he hated with true masculine hatred—when he found himself not only the accepted suitor of Thérèse, but making arrangements for an indecorously speedy marriage.

An old friend of Madame Delaureau's, having heard of her husband's death on arriving in London, came to offer his escort for her return to Brussels. He could not stay later than the end of October, and it was, of course, impossible for Thérèse to remain Sir William's guest after her aunt's departure. The most obvious course would have been for her to return to Brussels, and be married there ; but, for more than one unconfessed reason, she determined not to do this, and, by a slight sacrifice of so much

maidenly dignity as she possessed, so manipulated the difficulties of the case, that Sir William, to his own astonishment, proposed, while she accepted, the twenty-fourth of the ensuing month, October, for the day of their wedding.

His announcement of the affair was significantly preluded by his bringing Lady Louisa's diamonds to Luigia, with a pathetically humble request that she would accept them, "because she had Lady Marion's, and the D'Amorie diamonds had never gone out of the family."

"But I am not one of the family," said Luigia, trying to smile him out of his seriousness.

"You seem like it; at least, more than—and I know Lady Louisa intended that you should have them. Don't quibble over them, there's a dear child. Will you tell the doctor that Mademoiselle van Heil has consented to become my wife on the twenty-fourth of this month?"

"The twenty-fourth?" said Luigia, with what seemed a disproportionate interest in the date.

"Yes, she, Thérèse, wished it to be as late as possible, and on the twenty-fifth Madame Delaureau leaves London for Brussels."

"If it were any other day," sighed Luigia, involuntarily.

"Why?" said Sir William: then he too remembered.

Cecil's had been one of those lives which are singular even in little things; he had been born on the first anniversary of his parents' wedding, and he had died on his birthday. The day thus triply consecrated was this same twenty-fourth of October.

Like most business men, Sir William despised sentiment in general, and felt it acutely when it happened to touch him; now, looking older than he had ever done before, he said, "Thank you, my child, for reminding me;

the twenty-fifth will do as well; but Madame Delaureau cannot remain I fear, all her arrangements are made."

"Let Mademoiselle come to us; auntie will be happy to receive her, I know."

Thérèse could not well object, and was, in fact, indifferent; so the apparently unimportant change was made.

But, on the evening of the twenty-fourth, Sir William received a letter which effected tremendous results;—it ran thus:—

"MONSIEUR DE MABINGTON,—Our Empereur, whom I hate—is he not succès incarnate, while I have, in all things, failed?—this, notre Empereur, wills that we should learn from our neighbours, les Anglais, many things. Obeying the Imperial desire, I have studied the law of your nation with a young avocat whom I know, whom the police know also,—but for that no matter.

"By the help of your compatriot, I discover that the English law, from all time, has been purely a matter of money, and that a man robbed of his wife by one in your position can claim about two thousand livres. This, accordingly, I request from you, as the lady, votre épouse of this morning, is my wife, Thérèse, née van Heil; married to me at the church of Ste. Gudule, Bruxelles, on the fifteenth of June, 1855.

"Of course, I have the necessary papers to prove this, but Thérèse can confirm my assertion, if you inquire of her.

"Send me a cheque as desired, and you will retain the lady, and avoid the esclandre of the affaire; otherwise, I shall assurément prove dangereux.—Accept, Monseigneur, the assurance of my high esteem, and allow me to remain votre très obéissant,

"JULES RAMEAU."

It was a clever scheme for Rameau, but his daughter had wrecked it by procuring the alteration of the marriage day.

Madame Rameau, if Thérèse were she, could accompany her husband whenever he chose to come for her ; so wrote Sir William on what was to have been his wedding morning, not without a curious sense of relief, of which he was half ashamed.

He had taken the letter at once to Thérèse, her aunt having left London. Thérèse made no denial, but replied by a fit of crying, so hysterical and interminable, that Sir William, in irritated bewilderment, could make out nothing, save that she appeared to be sorry for, and that he had some reason to be glad of, Rameau's timely re-appearance.

He asked her, at first tenderly, then sternly, "Why did you not confess your marriage long ago, and so prevent all this sorrow and sin?"

"I did not like," said Thérèse ; a reply which seemed to her questioner such an exaggeration of imbecility, that he continued, impatiently,

"How did Monsieur Rameau learn the day fixed for your wedding?"

"I do not know ! I have never seen him since he left me suddenly, startled, on the steps of Sainte Gudule, as we returned from our marriage."

"Who was startled?"

"Jules, Monsieur Rameau; he was in debt, and he perceived what he thought was a creditor, but it was only *à jeune* Monsieur Vindon—I knew him after."

"Perhaps he knew him too, and did not wish to be discovered."

"No, how could he? *de plus*, they were friends after ; Jeanne saw them together, once, in the Allée Verte."

"Who was Jeanne?"

"One of the servants of my aunt; she is in London now, a *blanchisseuse*; she has washed our laces since we have been here."

"And, no doubt, has seen Rameau, and told him of you."

"Ah, perhaps."

Thérèse brightened at this, as though interest in her would excuse any amount of scheming.

Suddenly, Sir William remembered that other Madame Rameau, the mother of Lulu; he said, "Did you know that Monsieur Rameau had been married before?"

"Oh, yes; they were unhappy, he told me; there was a daughter, but she died."

"Yes. I do not approve of such second marriages, but it was honest of him to tell you. Good-bye, Thérèse. I forgive you both, and hope you will be better to each other."

At this farewell, Thérèse renewed her weeping, mingled with broken complainings, that she had believed Rameau to be dead, and that Sir William was cruel to leave her desolate. All which, grating against his English notions of good taste, only impelled him to escape speedily. But one of the few qualities which he had in common with his son Cecil, was a curious incapacity for anger; so, in answer to the doctor's wrathful inquiries for Thérèse, he said only, "Poor little thing, she wants balance sadly; but I daresay she will cling safely to her husband when he appears. Will you allow her to remain here till then? I am off to Cairo."

"Certainly; when do you start?" said the doctor, accepting the sudden journey as a matter of course, but Sir William added,

"It is not a new idea ; I meant to go soon, about a scheme of mine for irrigating that district. I want to see if the place will hold water."

"I should say yes, for a certainty, it being yours," said the doctor.

"Oh, that is because you only hear of those that come right, like old women's dreams. There is always a notion of some sort seething in my brain ; if one in five comes to anything, I am satisfied."

"You are sound at heart yet, old friend," said the doctor gladly.

"Yes, thanks to the good God who kept me from sin ; it was a happy thing that Rameau never heard of the change of day. I begin to think the Suttee is not such a bad institution ; only the Hindoos made a mistake in reserving it for widows, it is widowers who need it."

"I wonder whether Thérèse knows that Rameau has been separated from a wife still living."

"Yes, for once he seems to have been straightforward, and told her all, even about little Lulu."

"She does not know who Luigia is, does she ?"

"No, I think not. I absolutely forgot that ; my poor little Luigia ! She will not like her new stepmother."

"I doubt if anything her father did could surprise her, but I think Thérèse may as well wait for the intelligence till he comes ; the two never got on well together, and as relations they would find it harder still."

Rameau did not manifest any impatience to claim his wife. She wrote to the address given in his letter to Sir William, but received no reply. A short, sharp note of the doctor's was, however, more effectual : a day was fixed, and Rameau came.

Huldah saw him first, as she wished, for the sake of the

motherless girl who now seemed to be in her charge, to clear up the doubt as to his separation from Lulu's mother.

Rameau found Dr. Murray's wife rather a different person from Huldah Owain, and, as such, was inclined to treat her with more respect. He had altered too—grown somehow meaner, weaker, possibly more false ; but, oddly enough, he seemed no older. Huldah thought this might be because he was made up to claim a young bride ; but Rameau was one of those who are old young men, and young old men : at twenty-one, when he had married Luigia's mother, he had been old in deliberation, avarice, and cunning ; at forty-two, he had the lightness and comparative attractiveness of thirty. Huldah was less afraid of him now, and could be softer in her manner ; it was no longer her most precious possession that he came to claim : still, in the cause of right and womanhood, she pressed him for the truth concerning Lulu's mother.

At first he tried his old answer of a shrug of the shoulders, and what was meant for an expressive raising of his eyebrows ; but these might be translated anyhow, and Huldah was bent on obtaining a statement which she could not mistake.

At length, he said, "*Eh bien!* if you must have the truth, *toute nue*, the lady, your *voisine*, was not my wife, never."

"And Lulu?"

"She was my little child, for while she live we keep together ; that is all."

Huldah remembered then that on the child's grave there was no surname ; she remembered, too, that the mother, lazy and self-indulgent, with tastes neither healthy nor pure, was not one whose character rendered Rameau's desertion incredible.

"It is very sad," she said, "but the case being so, of

course I can only resign Thérèse to you. She knows, does she not?"

"*Certainement,*" said Rameau, impatiently; and Hul-dah went to prepare her guest.

Thérèse was waiting ready, and took leave of her entertainers with a coolness that relieved them of all fears on her behalf; but, as they stood all together in the hall, there came a resounding rap at the door. Lulu's mother entered, flushed and trembling.

"Rameau is here," she said; "I saw him enter."

Suddenly she was silent; in the blindness of excitement she had not at first seen that he stood there close to her, still, in his confusion, retaining Thérèse on his arm. Now she posed herself in front of the pair, with a calm, critical air, as though they were a *tableau-vivant* which she must re-arrange.

"Who are you?" said Thérèse, with the insolent air which she always had ready on occasion.

"Rather, mademoiselle, who are you?" began the other; but Rameau stopped her, with his exclamation of pure astonishment:

"Amélie! I thought—"

"That I had died, without you? Not precisely, *mon mari*. You are half a milliner; have you heard of Madame Amélie, *modiste, brodeuse, employer* of one hundred *démoiselles?* *C'est moi.*"

"What,—of the Rue de Rivoli?"

"Even so; I am not poor any more. How those Parisiennes would enrage themselves, could they know that some of their first decrees of fashion are issued by an Englishwoman! But they do know good taste these, my patronesses; and the others, the workers, they have not the English *grossièreté*; they are quick to seize an idea.

It was I who introduced ornaments fitting the seasons. When the swallows come, I say, we will have them on everything, bonnets, fans, ribbons—*et voilà!* it is done."

"She was an artist," said Rameau.

"And now an artiste," replied Madame Amélie, who seemed to have acquired the volubility of a French-woman; "only one little letter in addition, but some decrease of position—and increase of income; that atones."

"You were *trop paresseuse* for anything," said Rameau.

"Ah! that was with you. I was benumbed, bound; now I am free. But it is right that this young lady should know that I am your wife. See, mademoiselle, I keep this always." She drew from her pocket a paper, which she handed to Thérèse, who read thereon a certificate of marriage between Jules Rameau and Amelia Stanford, dated two years before her own. Some betraying exclamation escaped her, and Madame Amélie said, "So I suspected: I have been watching for something of the kind, but I did not know it was so long ago."

It is not good for a woman to find, as Madame Rameau had done, that she is better without her husband. There was a hard, metallic flavour about her now, which made Huldah think that she had liked her better in her lazy, romantic days.

Not so Rameau; he, with his customary coolness, had calculated the comparative advantages of his two spouses, and decided that the one who had sufficient means to maintain him must be preferable to the one whom he would have to maintain; accordingly, he turned to Thérèse, saying, "I am *désolé, ma belle*; but what Madame has said is true: we were married here in London; I told you, when you would have me, that I had had another wife."

" You said she was dead," said Thérèse, even then practising her pretty child's *moue*.

" No, that other—I meant the mother of Luigia."

" Of whom?—you said her child died."

" Yes, the little Lulu." It appeared that Rameau, among his many falsehoods, had confused himself.

" Why did you put only 'Little Lulu' on your child's grave?" said Huldah, turning to Madame Rameau.

" Sentiment, *poésie*, folly: how do you call it? I have outgrown the thing, till I have forgotten how to express it; but that was the sole reason; you need not believe me nor my husband, only this—examine it." She held out the certificate, a genuine one. Huldah turned to Rameau, and said indignantly, " I asked you about this just now, and you know what you answered."

Rameau's sole reply was a canine smile, the upper lip drawn away from the teeth, as though to clear them for action; he was getting angry among these complications. His wife sobered him, however, with a parting assurance that if he molested her, she would spend her fortune for a divorce; then she turned from him and departed.

He stood looking through the hall-window, watching her swift, resolute walk down the street, till she disappeared. At present he seemed to have gained nothing by acknowledging her, save what he was evidently not unwilling to accept—release from Thérèse, whom Huldah, crediting with womanly feeling, felt bound to protect and defend, and for whom a fresh access of anger prompted her to say, " Then, you simply lied to Thérèse?"

" If you will phrase it so,—you English are so hard in your expressions; see the difference between our '*sang froid*' and your 'cold blood.' Present that to Monsieur Murray, as my recognisance of his *études* in *étyologie*."

"What do you know of his pursuits?" said Huldah, with quickened interest.

"Oh, most things. I did not choose to lose sight of my daughter *entièrement*. Suppose you had died, Luigia might prove a fortune to me, as her mother would have been. That was how I came to make the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Thérèse. I learnt that Monsieur Delaureau was friend of Signor Gondio, and, after, of the Baron Mabington; both *intimés* of Dr. Murray; so I cultivate Monsieur and Madame Delaureau. Then to them came *le jeune* Monsieur—how does he call himself?—Vindon; from him I hoped to learn much, but he disappointed me; *au reste*, Mademoiselle would have me, and she gained me."

Thérèse turned upon Luigia, and said, "Then, all was through you—this, and, I know, the prevention of the other; but for you I should have been Lady Mabington. I will hate you till I die! I will hate you when I am dead! Do you hear?—you!"

She had grasped Luigia's arm, and stood glaring at her with an expression that seemed to impress even Rameau. With a muttered "Adieu!" he took leave.

Huldah said gently, "Poor child! she has no home. Come with me, my dear."

And Thérèse, with angry, wailing sobs, submitted to be led back to the room which, until her aunt could be communicated with, must be her own.

The doctor wrote at once to Madame Delaureau, but she had an old lady's tardiness in correspondence. When she did reply, it was, as she suggested, too late for Thérèse to travel; if their kind friends would allow her to remain with them till the spring, she would be grateful. So the matter was arranged.



CHAPTER XXIV.

THÉRÈSE'S DIVERSION.

THÉRÈSE was not precisely the guest that Ted and Luigia would have chosen as an accompaniment to the few remaining weeks they had to spend together. She was not positively unhappy; perhaps natures that cannot love, cannot sorrow. But, as was natural in her position, she suffered from a chronic sense of injury; which, in accordance with her nature, fastened on the wrong people. Rameau and herself she regarded as joint victims of a conspiracy between Madame Amèlie and Luigia; both of whom would have been much astonished at the notion of their acting in concert under any circumstances; there being between them that tacit natural aversion which results in simple avoidance.

Huldah, also, as of course an ally of Luigia's, fell under Thérèse's displeasure, and was made to suffer from a curious ingenuity of annoyance, which Mademoiselle developed about this time.

With an angry consciousness that some measure of agreeableness might be expected from her as the recipient of the doctor's hospitality, on which she could

not be said to have any claim, Thérèse seemed determined to demolish at once any vain hopes of such complaisance on her part ; and she had one tremendous advantage over these, her entertainers, in that she was of a coarser calibre ; so that, while they were fettered by the courtesy due to a guest, Thérèse rode rough-shod over all considerations of reciprocal delicacy. With that instinct of self-preservation, which seems to be strongest in the most worthless natures, finding her prettiness fading under the sudden lack of interest which had come upon her life, she set about to seek a diversion, and found a congenial one in her old purpose of separating Ted and Luigia.

It did not matter much to Thérèse that she had tried this before, and failed ; then it had been only a collateral aim, now it could have her entire energy, and she knew herself to be rich in those small resources which succeed, just because they are so apparently insignificant. She had quite an English school-girl's power of giggling, and Ted and Luigia could not enter the room together without bringing this into exercise, till their very sympathy caused them to fall apart, and by imperceptible degrees they even came to avoid each other so far, that the doctor fancied they were growing estranged.

It did not make things better that they both hated and despised their weakness in thus succumbing to Thérèse's ill-manners, which they knew well enough to be, like most ill-manners, simply ill-feeling ; that thought of each other, in which they had been wont to sun themselves, was now troubled by a constant sense of self-reproach, till they learnt to turn from it, unconsciously, with the inborn distaste for things gloomy which was strong in both natures.

They ought not to have done this—assuredly not ; they would not, had they been perfectly brave and strong ; but, alas ! perfection is not a condition of our moral, any more than of our physical nature. A man with an absolutely sound body might breathe poisoned air and not suffer, but there is no such man ; and though one who has not in him the peculiar receptive qualities necessary for its germination, may live with cholera, and not develop that precise disorder, yet his general tone will be lowered, may be, even unto death, since of death and of sin the seeds lie always within us.

It was just this tainting of their moral atmosphere that Thérèse effected for Ted and Luigia, who suffered the more, as persons will who are suddenly brought from pure air ; for by no conscious effort, but by the simple action of innocent, intelligent lives, the tone of the doctor's household had always been high ; their troubles had all come from things extraneous, and their poverty had been too frankly accepted to degrade. With them, love was a deep and sacred truth, environed always by a shekinah of glory, which only the chosen should penetrate. With Thérèse, love was a semi-contraband amusement, to be elaborately schemed for and disguised if one's own ; to be mercilessly exposed, like some forsaken babe, if pertaining to another.

All day long she would be alternately sullen and captious, till Huldah and Luigia were fairly worn out with the constant effort at self-restraint ; then, in the evening when the doctor and Ted joined them, she would brighten into that dreadfully sprightly talkativeness, which, as if by contrast, will make a whole roomful of people grow dull. She had always possessed a peculiar faculty for finding subjects of conversation that excluded all but one

listener ; so now, when, and only when, the two gentlemen, wearied with the day's work, came seeking refreshment, she would plunge Luigia into a series of inquiries concerning new music or new singers ; so seductive a topic to a musician, but to the others like the shallow plate of soup to the stork : then, when the doctor struck in with some of those wider questions of art beauty, in which Ted was sure to join, Thérèse would say, with a gracefully humble air of apology, "We have talked enough music to-night ; see, here are the chess-men."

Once seated at the chess-board, the doctor and Ted, skilful players and well-matched, were fixtures for the rest of the evening, and Luigia's singing, the one thing which never failed to draw Ted to her side, was prevented. Manceuvres, ridiculously small, but fatally important in this, that they were the first suggestion to the two who had been one, that their separate pursuits involved separate interests.

About this time Thérèse gained an unconscious, and for that reason a most potent, ally in Signor Gondio. As an old friend of her uncle, he paid her a friendly call. Thérèse received him with effusion ; at first as a possible admirer ; then, dismissing that idea with unusual alacrity, she seized on him as a suitable rival for Ted.

The Signore, with the force of one to whom self-mastery has become a habit, had battened down, and, as he believed, stifled his possessive, exclusive love for Luigia ; but she was still the pleasantest woman in the world to him ; the one who was always harmonious, whose simplest phrase could soothe him when harassed, or stimulate him when depressed, and he had such a southern longing for sunshine, such an instinctive habit of seeking it.

A little pauper babe, left out on the dark side of the way, will crawl across the road towards a spot of sunlight, with eyes only for it, blind to all threatening peril ; and the Signóre was just in the seductive repose of one who, after a long day's walk over dry and barren ground, has resisted the temptation to rob his neighbour's vine, and lies down to rest beneath its shade : only the glow and fragrance of the grapes shall be his ; only so much as the commonest passer-by may gather ; surely the happy possessor could not grudge this.

But Ted, the possessor, was not happy ; with a constant, indefinite sense of harass upon him, he was just ready for those seeds of jealousy which Thérèse's malice dropped, and the Signóre's carelessness germinated.

As for Luigia, she was heartily glad of the presence of the one friend who could neither be hurt nor offended. Between Thérèse's ill humour and Ted's growing sensitiveness, she seemed to be always suffering from prickly heat, and the Signóre's gentle surface talk was like soft, cool air to her fevered soul. Just because this feeling of hers went no deeper than a pleasant friendship, she was frank in its manifestation, and thus, in her pure simplicity, played, by Thérèse's showing, the part of a finished coquette.

Alas! it was through Thérèse's eyes that Ted, detesting her still, was learning to gaze, and to suffer as those will who, looking through coloured glass, see a withered, arid plain, where in fact the green grass waves, with the morning sunshine on its dew.

One evening, Mr. Ardine had asked leave to come and try over the music of a cantata by a new composer, in which he was to accompany Luigia. He came accordingly, and later in the evening, Signor Gondio following,

they tried some songs of his ; Mr. Ardine with the pleasant feeling that, having attained the age of twenty, he was now a contemporary of his old master, whose eighteen years of seniority had once seemed to place him at an unattainable distance a-head.

He, Mr. Ardine, had a very fair bass voice for a room, but his Italian accent was so irretrievably bad, that he had headed a crusade, not against foreign music, but in favour of all such being set to English words, and he suggested now to Signor Gondio that it would be well to have his songs translated ; whereupon ensued a discussion, the Signore, of course, upholding his beloved Italian as the only tongue fit to sing in. Luigia said she always found a song most effective in the language in which it was composed. The doctor took the opportunity to get a little fun out of certain very bold translations which had lately come under his notice, and Thérèse said, frankly, that she did not care much for French songs, and her native Flamande was by no means a melodious language.

" Yet," said Ted, " it seems to be curiously like the English of Queen Elizabeth's time, and we were a musical nation then."

" Is it so like?" said the doctor, always alive to a point of philology.

" Yes ; on the floor of St. Jacques I picked up a little catechism on the ' Kruisweg,' which I could understand very well by reading it aloud with a German accent, so as to get the sound of the words ; they are queer to look at."

" Well," said Huldah, " I know no one will agree with me, but I think that, next to Italian, Welsh is the most singable of languages."

There was a general outcry of amazement and dissent.

"It is like all the primitive languages, too guttural," said the doctor.

"That is because you so seldom hear cultivated Welsh; the speech of those whose lives are hard will always be rough; it is only from the peasantry that the English in general hear Welsh."

"But it is all consonants," said Mr. Ardine.

"Have you a verse of eight lines in English without one consonant?" said Huldah.

"No, I never heard of such a thing in any language."

"Unless Polynesian," suggested the doctor.

"Well, we have—a foolish little rhyme enough, about a butterfly, and a spider weaving his web."

Here Thérèse, with an exaggerated air of weariness, turned to Mr. Ardine and Signor Gondio, and requested, "Some music, or something."

Accordingly, they, with Luigia, sang a favourite trio of the Signóre's; a merry little fishing song, with a fresh breath of sea-breezes blowing through it.

Two fishing lads had wooed a maiden, who promised to accept the one that should bring home the fullest boat on a certain evening; then, having put her decision in the hands of fate, she took fate into her own hands, by privately going fishing herself, meeting the favoured lover in a sheltered cove, and emptying her boat into his.

Mr. Ardine acted the unsuccessful lover to perfection. Luigia's dramatic instincts were irrepressible, and, for the time, she was the wild, little maiden, half simple and half shy; while the Signóre—well, words and music were his own, he might be pardoned a little undue expressiveness; certainly, as Thérèse observed to Ted, he wooed his old, pet pupil *con amore*.

Suddenly, Ted, distinguished even in his troubled

boyhood for imperturbable good temper, was wrapped in a furious passion, white and dumb with rage, and Thérèse stood by his side, calm and mocking, with the smile of an evil angel.

For once, Mr. Ardine's obtuseness did good service : he took leave, with only the complaisant impression that "Miss Rameau might have done better than accept that surly Vindon."

How much the Signôre understood, and felt, no one could tell, but it was not likely that any one would ever discover, which was one comfort. He had that rare gift, a perfect manner, which, even now, constrained Ted into a passably courteous "Good evening."

Then, when both the guests had departed, Ted, with the one impulse of self-mastery left to him, escaped to his own room, and there, with locked doors, entertained the demon of jealousy that had visited his soul.

"What is the matter with Ted ?" said the doctor, perceiving something thunderous in the air.

Huldah was beginning some woman's plea of "Not very well," but Thérèse, who was brave in giving pain, said promptly, "I think he is ashamed of himself ;" and Luigia, alas ! felt that the supposition was not altogether groundless, and spent the still, night hours in weeping over the first flaw in him who was all the world to her.

Even in the delirium of his wrath Ted recognised this : that Luigia was true to him,—"as yet," he added, bitterly ; that he had only to forbid her intercourse with the Signôre, for her to obey at once, with, probably, a little startled surprise that he should think such a prohibition necessary. In imagination, he could see the innocent, astonished look in her tender eyes, and he shrank from thus awaking her.

The fiercest tornado that sweeps over a landscape, and effaces all its tranquil beauty, cannot touch the rocks beneath, and in Ted's soul, torn, and ravaged, and burning as it was, there lay, deep and firm, the gold quartz of his character—a certain unconscious magnanimity. If suffering became inevitable, he would bear his own burden and that of his companion also ; he had that English form of heroism which performs the heroic as a matter of course, accepts a task just because it is painful.

A moment's loosening of the iron bands of self-control had revealed the Signôre's secret, Love being keen-sighted for Love, and if it was, as he feared, that Luigia would have returned Signor Gondio's affection, but that he, Ted, had been the first to awaken her womanly consciousness,—if it was so that the sympathy of pursuits in the two musicians was but the cropping out of a vein of deeper metal ; that Signor Gondio, gentle and pure, as Ted's invulnerable truth acknowledged him to be, even now,—that he could really make Luigia happy, be her true husband in some future time, when he, Ted, was far away, and as a lover forgotten,—then, there must be no quarrel between him and the Signôre now, the remembrance of which might shadow that quiet time to come.

If only he could tell Luigia's real feeling, present and possible ! He remembered the brightness with which she had greeted the Signôre of late, in contrast to the solicitous, troubled air that had clouded her interviews with himself ; he remembered, too, the readiness of her proud, little letter of release,—so is it that past errors rise against us, even with dear friends ; remembered that, even in that sweet time of reconciliation, she had said, “ We are free.”

“ Oh, mother ! whom I never knew,” moaned Ted, in

his desolate unrest, "if you had but lived, to teach me how to read a woman's heart."

Huldah had most nearly filled a mother's place to him, and to her he went next morning, not with the whole matter, but with a question.

"Do you remember, auntie, telling me that Luigia, on the night of her *début*, began a confession of love?"

"Yes."

"Who did you suppose, at the time, that it referred to?"

"Then, I thought Signor Gondio, as being her only friend; afterwards I knew it was you,—your last few letters had been wooing her, unconsciously."

"She did not love me when I came home."

"No, your *personnel* was strange to her; many a woman loves a man's spirit long before she can endure the touch of his hand. On that night she was in one of those states of excitement when the clearness of a seer comes over the soul."

"Highly metaphysical, but unsatisfactory," said Ted, so drearily that Huldah carried the matter to her infallible comforter, her husband.

"Yes," said the doctor, "loveable as Ted and Luigia both are, I have doubted lately whether they suit each other; if not, it is infinitely better that they should find it out now."

"You think we can do nothing?"

"Nothing. I have no faith in go-betweens in such things; but we need not give up either of our children because they are unhappy."

So they withdrew from the complexity, and Ted, doing violence to his impulsive nature, was patient and considerate; and so more cruel than if he had been fiercely vindictive, for he gave Luigia no opportunity to rectify his judgment.

By some combination of ill-fortune and Thérèse, it happened that Signor Gondio came one evening to take them to an opera concert, for which he had a box. Thérèse was ready, but Luigia, notwithstanding solicitations and inuendoes, had determined to stay at home, with the half-instinctive feeling that her only chance of an explanation with Ted, was when Thérèse was out of the house.

It is easy to keep down love when the loved one is happy: but dear, dimmed eyes, shaded by lashes wearily drooping; sweet, eloquent, silent lips, falling into sorrowful curves—these make the task difficult, impossible.

It was with a desperate recklessness that the Signore let his heart flutter to his lips, as he said to Luigia, “Can you not come with us?”

“No,” she answered, with that frank showing of her real self, which she always granted to him. They were standing in the little conservatory which terminated the drawing-rooms; she, with her graceful head drooping sadly, he, tender, eager, yet subdued.

Thérèse stealthily brought Ted “to see such a pretty *tableau vivant*,” and, seated in the shade of the window curtains, he, who in his whole life had never done a dis-honourable thing, listened only for two sentences, but these were enough, too much, since he totally misunderstood them.

“Are you engaged to Mr. Vindon?” said the Signore in continuation of his request.

“No, oh no, but—it is impossible to-night.”

With a sudden loathing, Ted shook off Thérèse’s detaining touch from his arm, and fled again to that room of his, which was beginning to be full of ghosts.

“I! Ted Vindon! listening in the dark, like a mean hound of a robber, and Luigia only by an effort keeping

her faith! Well, I can free her from that; but they might have waited a little longer. What a strange, bad world it is! Are we born leprous-tainted, I wonder, so that the vileness must ooze out, some time in our lives? As the two stood there, I could willingly have been a blind Samson, and crushed myself to death for the sake of crushing them."

With the sternness of his purpose in his face, Ted sought Luigia, and said,

"I come to release you from such shadow of an engagement as yet exists between us."

She answered him only with a look—a look at once so gentle and so mournful, as must have melted him, but that he could not see it; the film of emotion clouding his vision showed her face as only a pale outline, with dark spots for the pleading eyes.

"Do you understand?" he continued, with a white heat that seemed like freezing.

"Yes," she said, at length; "I understand: you do not love me any more; it is enough."

She turned, and walked from the room, with the erectness of one stiffened by a sudden agony,—the erectness of Marie Antoinette going to execution; not pride, not defiance, simply the acceptance of the inevitable.

That night Luigia spent in tearless misery; moaning now and then, unconsciously, till little Faust, in his station on the mat outside her door, could bear the sound no longer, and set up such a pitiful low cry for admission, that she rose and let him in; then lay down again, with her hand upon the faithful dog's head to comfort him.

The soothing, dumb love melted her anguish to tears, and at once calmed and exhausted by these she fell asleep;—little Faust lying stiff and rigid, rather than lose the pressure of her hand.



CHAPTER XXV.

TED'S DEPARTURE.

Twas a soft spring morning. The idiot lad who supplied Harriet's pet lark with turf, had begun his glad summer cry of "All a-growin', all a-blowin'," and the sparrows were rehearsing for their house-warming concert.

Ted had gone to Southampton, to make the final arrangements for his voyage. He was doubtful whether he would have time to return, so he had departed with a provisional good-bye, including Luigia among the rest, as though she who had been more was now less to him than any.

It seemed to her impossible that this should be their parting; surely something, his own heart, would bring him back to her, if only for a moment. She sat listening to the footsteps in the street, till she felt as though she were beneath them, trampled and crushed.

Thérèse had one of her fits of talkativeness, which consisted, as usual, of a knotty string of questions, alternately uninteresting and impertinent. Huldah sat reading.

Suddenly there came a short rat-tat.

"The postman," said Thérèse, who was sitting near the window.

"I did not think it was his time," said Luigia, with the sickening expectation of she knew not what whitening her lips. Presently, Thérèse, who had left the room, returned, saying "Only a letter for me."

It happened that no one replied, so, as if annoyed, she wrote on a leaf of her pocket-book, "Madame Murray is engaged. I go for a promenade : will you accompany me? Write your answer on a card of yours, there is one in the basket."

Knowing the whim, Luigia, as Thérèse had expected, wrote "No."

"Why not?" said the pocket-book.

"I cannot," replied the card.

"Write 'I will not,' and sign, 'Luigia,'" wrote Mademoiselle ; and Luigia added these words to the rest, acquiescing, as usual, in such absurdities as seemed harmless.

With a smile of satisfaction that, somehow, troubled Luigia, Thérèse set out upon her walk, having, as if inadvertently, taken the card with her.

"If Ted would but come now," thought Luigia, with a longing that was almost a prayer, but he did not come.

Ted had decided not to renew his farewells, but the starting of his vessel was delayed, and he found himself with a day to spare in that most uninteresting of places, Southampton.

A strange little space of time it seemed to him, cut off from his two lives, Africa and England, like a reprieve granted for some vital work. His first impulse was to

devote it to a hurried interview with Luigia. There would be just time, but he decided against this as he was about to take his ticket, remembering that Thérèse had told him (falsely) that Signor Gondio was to come that evening, to rehearse some music with Luigia.

"No," muttered Ted, half angry and half magnanimous, "I will not break in upon them, like the ghost of a dead husband appearing to a widow half-consoled.—Oh, little Luigia ! the very ideal of womanhood which you yourself gave me makes me hard upon you now."

Restlessly weary, he went on to the platform to see a train come in. Alighting from one of the carriages was Madame Cialdini, as usual alone. It was so pleasant to see again a face he knew, when he thought he had said "Farewell" to all such, that he hastened to greet her, with something of his old, bright eagerness.

"Ah, *mon brave*," she said, "I have been staying with friends. I suppose you are riding away on the neck of success."

"My success is but a starved Rosinante," he answered, relapsing into bitter remembrance.

With a quick, graceful change of manner, she linked her hand in his arm and said, "What is wrong ? Tell me ; have you time ?"

"A day too much."

"Tell me then, *mon pauvre*. You know I am so old to be your mother, but I am not quite hard yet ! Ah, no !"

There was always something pathetic about the way in which the lonely, gifted woman spoke of having a heart still, and this impelled Ted to confidence ; all the more because on the eve of a long journey, as on that of death, reserve seems needless, secrets superfluous.

He told her, first, of the alleged forgery of his picture, that old wound which seemed always to open when he was depressed.

"It was hard, very hard," she said, tenderly; "strange! how the true artist, like the true saint, is wrought in anguish."

Tears rested in the magnificent eyes, that were liquid still, and Ted, looking down into them, found for the moment something like a mother's comforting, and so unfolded the hapless story of his love.

But here her approval, and with it her sympathy, failed him.

"You foolish boy! you very foolish boy!" she said, in tones graver than her words; "it is bad enough to lose the joy of life, but to throw it away, that is worse!"

"Indeed,—" began Ted.

But she silenced him. "Do you think I do not know your nature,—the very essence of impatience, jealous, over-sensitive, fanciful?"

"I would not contradict that, but—Luigia—"

"Hers! I tell you it is the sweetest the sun ever ripened, but it needs the sunshine, it will never mellow now. Oh, foolish boy! oh, wrong and wicked boy!"

"I think you mistake, as others have done, her feeling for me."

"I mistake? Alas! no. Do you think I could create loving women for twenty years, and cannot conceive one love?"

"There are actresses who could not," said Ted, glad to turn aside the hurt she pressed so hard.

"Actresses? yes, poor wretches! they do not create, they imitate. Why, even yet, they copy me, and I sit in my box and laugh; bitter laughing, though; it is not

pleasant to see one's own ghost making itself ridiculous. But again, I say, you foolish boy ! you wrong and wicked boy !"

"But what can I do ? It is too late now."

"No : telegraph to her, she will have it in time for the train that leaves London at twelve ; beseech her to come to you, as on an errand of life or death, and, if I know her, she will obey."

"I will," said Ted, gratefully wringing Madame's little hand.

"*Addio!—coraggio!*" she answered, in Luigia's very tones, and she moved away, a veritable queen still. From her carriage-window she watched Ted into the telegraph office, then she leant back, with a weary little sigh, "*Ah povera me !*"

The telegraph clerk was an important-looking youth, whose claims to distinction rested chiefly on his rather singular combination of a negro mouth with an Irish nose. He seemed to think that Ted's message, "Come at once, for Christ's sake," might be fineable, under the act against profane swearing ; but less would not have seemed to Ted sufficiently urgent.

"If I know her, she will come," he mused, repeating Madame's words, as though they were a spell, while he waited and watched, in a fever of eagerness.

At length the train arrived by which Luigia should come, and he pressed forward to see the passengers descend. A slight, graceful woman came in sight.

"Luigia," said Hope.

"She would never wear a hat like that," said Disappointment.

"Surely I have seen her in that cloak," said Doubt.

As the figure approached, it proved to be that of a

smirking, tittering girl, with a face at once foolish and hard.

"That Luigia!" He could have scourged himself for so maligning her image; but even Ted's strained faculties quickened into wonder as the young lady met him. It was Thérèse van Heil!

"Ah," she said blandly, "you mistook me for Luigia, did you not? Our mantles are alike. When your message came, she was engaged with Signor Gondio; so, of course, it was not possible for her to attend. *Vous comprenez, n'est ce pas?*"

The smile that accompanied these words seemed demoniac to Ted. He asked, with the air of one stupefied,

"Did you see the telegram, then?"

"Oh, yes," said Thérèse, with an air of cheerful alacrity; speaking the truth, she had read it, and no one else, she having taken it from the messenger and kept it.

"Luigia said it was not of much consequence, but she would telegraph a response; so I offered to take it to the station for her, and when I arrived the train was about to go, and I thought I would bring—"

"Her reply," said Ted, holding out his hand for the card in hers.

She gave it to him: it was that on which Luigia had written, "I cannot. I will not.—Luigia."

The very carelessness of the writing had made it unmistakeably, fatally hers. Luigia had written this! and sent it thus!

"Is this all?" he said presently, and the despair in the deep, strong tones would have rent the heart that loved him.

Thérèse bowed in assent.

" You must forgive me, mademoiselle, for not thanking you, after you have kindly taken so much trouble."

" It is nothing. I was most happy," said Thérèse, the customary formula sounding drearily out of place ; but she was sincere in the assertion. She had set her heart on this separation, with that Flemish tenacity which did such good service at Waterloo, but which is apt to become dangerous when concentrated on personal matters : a bull-dog's grasp of a canary is likely to be rather too effective.

" I suppose you would like to return immediately," said Ted ; " I will get your ticket," and he went, saying, as he returned, " How did you manage in coming down ? "

" Monsieur my uncle had friends in Havre, so we have come to London by this way."

Both question and answer were alike cold and uninterested.

Perhaps no man ever loved his dentist, and it was in this light that Ted regarded Thérèse ; while she was a business-like young person, who, having accomplished the matter in hand, had no further care to bestow upon it.

Ted watched Thérèse and the train disappear, and then, having still some time to spare, set out on a long rapid walk, trying to make physical exhaustion deaden the pain within him.

" If I know her, she will come," Madame Cialdini had said ; and Luigia had not come !

Perhaps it was always so. Perhaps no one could know any one, and the world was peopled with solemn enigmas, walking in the dark. A dreary thought this to think, as Ted thought it, on a lonely country road, with nought but the soft, shadowy moonlight for cheering and guidance ; yet it did cheer him, the moonlight, though it

was only by lighting up the exquisite sharp curves of a tall clump of thistles.

"Yes," he said, with a quieter sigh, a sigh at once acquiescent and content. "God, the Creator, understands us every one, and the dear old Mother Earth tranquilly bears the burden of ages, and goes on rearing the children who forget her, and despise her, and are glad to repose in her bosom at last,—at last. How that welcome, long-deferred rest will refresh us for the dazzling day-dawn of Heaven! Thank God for death. Struggling, and panting, and torn, the soul would rush, with discordant weeping, among the harmonies of the angels, but that 'He giveth His beloved sleep.'"

Calm and strengthened, Ted went on board the vessel, and stood leaning over the ship's side, watching the day break. Softly there stole over the sea a bright, mellow flush, like that of a maiden at the first glimpse of her lover; then he came, the glorious, quickening sun, and the glowing waters seemed to leap towards him, and don their robes of splendour, purple, and crimson, and green.

It was a sight that could but stir the heart of the gazer, stir it to its depths, where, heavy and cold, lay its mortal agony.

As the land grew distant and dim, Ted, stretching out longing arms, unconsciously murmured, "Little one—little one—Good-bye—Good-bye!"

When Thérèse returned to Gwynne Street it was night.

Huldah said gently, "Another time, my dear, when you are going out for the day, let us know; we have been uneasy about you."

"I have not dined," said Thérèse, sullenly; she had a

vexed, illogical sense of having spent herself in Luigia's service.

"Poor child, you shall have something directly; we waited for you till seven."

"I have been to see Jeanne," said Thérèse, feeling, apparently, that some explanation was called for.

"Oh, that was right; your old nurse, was she not?"

"Yes, and she tell me about my mother, and when I was little child; it was evening before we know."

Thérèse, having constructed her falsehood, found it easy to elaborate it.

"Where does she live now?" said Huldah, keeping up the conversation in compunction for having been, she feared, rather harsh to the motherless girl.

"Oh, a long way over the river. I tell the cabman, and he ask, ask, all the time."

"Oll the tahime," said the doctor, with a kindly mimicking of her broad, deliberate accent, and the matter was dismissed.

Luigia waited, watching the still night-sky, fearing to sleep, even had she been able, lest a message should come even then. But there was none.

In the evening of the next day came a letter to the doctor, which Ted had sent off by the last boat that left the vessel; it was a mere note, stating simply that they had sailed, that he was well, and that he remembered them all.

There was no mention of Luigia's name, and, in the bitterness of her disappointment, she forgot that there were two subjects on which Ted, loquacious generally, had always preserved a sacred reticence—his art and his love.

So suddenly had this sorrow come upon her, that she

was like a man whose path has been split up by a flaming aërolite, the molten iron of which lies bedded in the ground before him. A shade more, and it must have killed him. It seems wonderful that he should live still; wonderful, and almost terrible.

Sometimes,—not often, thank God—we realise the awfulness of life ; its capacity for suffering, even eternally, till it seems to weigh us down, a jewel too heavy for us to wear, and we would fain lift it off, and accept, thankfully, annihilation.

Huldah watched Luigia's fading cheeks, and gave her physical health tenderest care, but she had attained the optimism of peaceful middle-age. If it was well for Luigia and Ted to be united, God could bring it to pass; if it was not well, she could not wish it.

There was a mathematical truth in this which she tried to impart to Luigia, but that was not possible.

On the plain of Waterloo there is a mound, from which if it had been there then, a spectator might have had a better idea of the battle than even the commanders engaged therein ; one of whom, who could afford to be truthful, is said to have described it as "all smoke and noise." But, down in the fray itself, among dust, and struggle, and wounds, it is often difficult to remember that the conflict has a plan, a purpose, at all.

Thérèse did not find her success so satisfactory as she expected. For a while, she derived some gratification from bringing Ted's name into the conversation, and watching Luigia's instantaneous flush of pain. Not quite such a fiendish amusement as appears, for, to Thérèse pain meant only mortified vanity.

Then she tried speaking ill of the absent one, and rousing Luigia to indignant defence ; but neither the

doctor nor Huldah would suffer Ted to be discussed in any way in their presence, and Luigia, though against the courteous instincts of her nature, resorted at length to the unassailable armour of silence.

A stinging speech that meets with no reply at all falls back upon the speaker with a dead flatness, curiously mortifying, and Thérèse began to look for her recall to Brussels with the eagerness of one desperate with ennui.

She had no liking for any of the amusements of the doctor's family—for books, or music, or art; anything like conversation puzzled and irritated her, and in society she was apt to be overlooked, in spite of her undeniable prettiness.

Ted had once said of her, "She frightens, like Keats's 'Lamia,'" and Mr. Gusty usually spoke of her as "that dreadfully smiling young person."



CHAPTER XXVI.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

AT length, Madame Delaureau wrote respecting her niece's return to her. She said that, on arranging her husband's affairs, she found herself poorer than she had expected, and that it was not possible for her to offer Thérèse a home ; it would be better, therefore, for her to make herself a position as gouvernante ; she, Madame, had heard that continental ladies were much sought after in England, and, doubtless, Dr. Murray and Signor Gondio would favour her with letters of introduction. The letter appeared almost cruel, because of Thérèse's manifest unfitness for the proposed employment ; she had neither education nor capacity for teaching, and her moral deficiencies were so patent, that the Doctor at once exclaimed, with boyish uncompromisingness, "Catch me recommending her anywhere ! "

"Perhaps she could undertake accomplishments," suggested Luigia.

"If she had any, but she hasn't ; she speaks French and English correctly enough, because she has not been

accustomed to hear them spoken otherwise ; but she has no grammatical knowledge of either, and her accent in both is abominable."

" She plays," said Huldah.

" Yes, a ragged scramble, which she only passes off by sheer impudence ; she has neither ear nor brains."

" Poor Thérèse ! "

" That is the worst of it. I hate having to be sorry for people I don't like ; we can't get rid of her, and she is fretting Luigia to fiddle-strings."

" Indeed, I do not mind," began Luigia.

" Nonsense, child ; you never had a talent for taking care of yourself, and you stand no chance with Mademoiselle Thérèse ; she torments you because she knows you will not repay her."

Some one else took this view of the case. Signor Gondio decided at once that Madame Delaureau's plan must be accepted, with modifications, and never rested till he had hunted out an old merchant, whose eyesight had failed, and who wanted an amanuensis.

" Do you think Thérèse will consent ? " said Luigia, doubtfully.

" She must," said the Doctor.

And Mademoiselle agreed accordingly ; but it was with an enraged sense of mortification, which, as usual, fastened upon Luigia. If she, little hateful thing ! had not already filled the place, the Doctor might have adopted Thérèse ; so thought Mademoiselle Van Heil, who when a child had gone on a visit to her Uncle Delaureau, and stayed fifteen years. Luigia perceived something of this feeling, and regretted it ; but Thérèse's ill-will was no new trouble, and she hoped that now it would die away in forgetfulness, and prove as unsubstantial as its provocation, whatever

that might have been. She did not know what it had done, nor what it would do.

One night Luigia awoke suddenly, to find Thérèse at her bed-side.

"What is it?" she asked, with the quietness of extreme bewilderment.

"I meant to kill you; and then—I was afraid," said Thérèse, peevishly, like a disappointed child.

Involuntarily, as it seemed, she held out a great knife.

With an instant's prayer and thanksgiving, Luigia recognised at once her peril and her deliverance; but she only said as calmly as she could, "Such a clumsy knife! lend it to me."

Reluctantly Thérèse's fingers unclosed from the ghastly weapon, and Luigia laid it down openly, out of reach of them both; then she ventured to look up into the face of her visitant, expecting to see there the wild gaze of temporary derangement; but, to her horror she saw that Thérèse was not mad, except as the wicked are mad. She had come with set purpose, and the baleful light of hate yet lingered in her eyes; only, by God's grace, the womanhood within her, weak as it was, had struggled upwards, and conquered.

For a while, the two gazed at each other, as across a great gulf. Then Thérèse wailed, feebly, "Shall I go back to bed? I kept awake, and now I am so tired."

"Yes, go," said Luigia, and drew a shawl round her.

Thérèse shivered painfully, and moaned. "Don't touch me, but come with me. I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of myself;" and her glazed, fixed eyes expressed that the evil thirst for life, now awakened, would feed even on its own.

"I will come," said Luigia, and the two ghostly figures glided along the landing.

As they passed the door of Huldah's room, where the regular sounds of breathing told of peaceful sleep, Thérèse grasped Luigia's arm, with an air of mingled threat and entreaty; then her own room gained, she threw herself face downwards upon the bed, and wept such weeping as Luigia prayed never to see again. It was like a visible combat of good and evil spirits, struggling for the possession of a perishing soul.

Till the day dawned, Luigia knelt and prayed; no glib orisons, but short, fragmentary sentences of pleading, consisting almost entirely of that great lever of power "For Jesus Christ's sake."

At length Thérèse grew quieter, only repeating at intervals the pitiful "Don't leave me. I am afraid of myself."

When the morning sunshine filled the room, she slept the deep, dreamless sleep of exhaustion, and Luigia stole away to dress.

About an hour after, Huldah and Luigia met in the breakfast-room.

With a startled look, Huldah said, "My child, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"Why?" said Luigia.

"Only see." Huldah drew her to the mantel-glass, and Luigia herself was amazed. One does not pass such nights with impunity; her face seemed to have absolutely fallen away; there were deep hollows round the mouth and eyes, and these looked out, as from a great depth—dark, and solemn, and wan.

"Well, I do look rather unprepossessing," she said, with a smile that tried to be bright, and was pathetic.

"But where have you been?" said Huldah, in tones at once angry, bewildered, and tender.

"In a horror of great darkness, and of the Shadow of Death," Luigia answered, shuddering, now that it was passed. Then, as though she was fearful of being melodramatic, she plunged at once into the history, with a matter-of-fact air, that was only stirred into a gesture of pain when the doctor's entrance obliged her to repeat part of the narration. Towards the end, the two auditor's were pale with suppressed feeling; at length the doctor said:

"The woman must be a fiend. What have you ever done that she should hate you like this?"

"I think," said Luigia, "that she has an idea that it was through me Sir William delayed, and so escaped, his marriage; and, though we cannot regret that—"

"Not exactly! I fancy he appreciated his good fortune at the time. I wonder what he would say now?"

"Still," pursued Luigia, "it was an injury, from her point of view, and she was shamefully used by my father."

"Then let her stick knives into him. A carving-knife, too! Any woman of decency would have procured a stiletto, but Thérèse always did despise sentiment."

The doctor spoke jestingly, but he looked grim earnest, and presently burst out with, "I will have her taken up, and tried for intimidation, or something."

"I don't think that would do any good," said Luigia, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps not, if you treat it as a question of pure reasoning; but haven't you any feeling in the matter, after being half murdered?"

"Oh yes," said Luigia, tears at last starting to her eyes. "I am grieved for Thérèse."

"Well, I suppose some women are angels," said the doctor testily, as though the supposition was rather irritating than otherwise, but presented the only feasible solution of an old perplexity.

"I was thinking," said Huldah, "we cannot send Thérèse among those unsuspecting strangers now."

"No, indeed; the poor old man might offend her in some way."

"Well,—by so much religion as she has, she is a Catholic; are there not some religious houses, that, knowing all, would receive her?"

"Yes," said a thin, spectral voice, suddenly sounding in their midst; "do let me go. I used to think I should hate it, but not now—not now. There is one for penitents, on the road to Anvers; I remember going there once with my mother, and one of the lay sisters patted me on the cheek. Do let me go."

"Listening, Mademoiselle?" said the doctor frigidly.

"Yes," she answered, simply raising her eyes, with absolutely an air of innocence; it had never dawned on her that there could be any culpability in that.

After all that had passed, the doctor found himself muttering, "Poor little thing!" and then awoke to angry astonishment at his doing so. But Thérèse was dangerous no longer; she was grievously shaken in mind and body. Utterly unused to self-examination or control, she had drifted to the verge of a great crime, with her moral sense unawakened. There, on the brink, it had suddenly started into a galvanic life, abnormal, terrifying. She feared everything now, most of all her own soul; and she clung to Luigia, with a dog-like fondness that was curiously repulsive, but pitiful withal.

Even now, Thérèse confessed nothing of her share in

Ted's departure. The inborn, characteristic secretiveness of her nature would go with her to the end. She refused an interview with her priest, who had indeed but very slight knowledge of her, as she had been by no means a regular attendant at either mass or confession. All the will she had remaining seemed to be concentrated in an eager desire to get away to her convent, without seeing anyone, and before her aunt, especially, and Signor Gondio also, should have heard the reason of her withdrawal. The doctor, however, insisted on writing to Madame Delaureau before permitting Thérèse to take any decisive steps, and her reply came in a day or two. She did not seem to be astonished or shocked by any of the details, but highly approved of Thérèse's taking the veil, and having an old acquaintance with the Reverend Mother of the religious house chosen by Thérèse, that lady had consented to receive her at once.

There remained, therefore, no difficulty but an escort to Brussels. So the Signore, whose well-bred lack of curiosity had been serviceable before, was set to work, and discovered a worthy Anglo-Belgian about to take his daughter to school in Brussels, who professed himself happy to serve any friend of Signor Gondio's, and undertook to consign Thérèse safely to her aunt's house, from whence the Mother Superior had arranged to send for her.

Claudine Verboeck, the young school-girl whom Thérèse was to accompany, rejoiced at the prospect of a grown-up young lady for compagnon de voyage, as promising her all kinds of surreptitious delights. She was proportionably disappointed with the veiled, grave figure that represented the desired young lady. "*Si bête,*" she muttered, discontentedly, to her father, who replied with

a whisper of Thérèse's destination ; but Claudine only wrinkled her fair, fleshy forehead into a note of interrogation : What did that matter ? She had seen *religieuses* before, they were always *assez gaies* : so, as no other amusement could be extracted from her, she took to tormenting Thérèse, who, however, was too old in this art not to detect and parry Claudine's small thrusts even now. She did so with a practised skill which the young demoiselle at once recognised and respected, and which, while it increased her wonderment, rendered her inoffensive for the rest of the journey.

Poor little Claudine ! she was bound for a longer journey, with a darker, more hidden termination, than even that of Thérèse.

Brussels is famous for bad fish, and Claudine, eating some in the sultry autumn weather, after her wholesome English diet, fell suddenly ill. It was not cholera, so said *Madame la Directresse*, and *Monsieur le médecin* of the pension, but it was fearfully like it thought the panic-stricken domestics ; and, almost alone, the thoughtless girl was left to battle through the disorder, and be vanquished.

Not quite alone though ; worthy Madame Delaureau, grateful to Monsieur Verbooeck for his care of her niece, called on his daughter after his departure, and, hearing that she was ill, asked to be shown to her room.

Claudine was delirious now, and mistaking the visitor for her mother, implored her to remain, with that child clinging which no true woman can resist.

Quietly and faithfully, the good old lady filled the absent mother's place. Her hands busied with soothing offices, her lips with gentle murmurs of such talk as suits the dying ; some of this reached the child's troubled soul.

With a satisfied whisper of "The holy Jesus," in Madame Delaureau's arms she "fell asleep," to sleep until the Great Awakening.

Her task ended, Madame Delaureau fell back into her life-long habit of coldness and dryness, and Claudine's mother, chilled by the frigid reception of her gratitude, grieved anew that "the child, dear angel! should have been left to that shrivelled, heartless old lady." But she did not know.

Thérèse shrank into her convent, like a bird that has been lost, and is glad to find even a cage round him.

The restraints and dreary sameness only gave her a feeling of safety; for she knew, better than anyone could know, how her purpose of killing Luigia had been no sudden impulse, but a fixed intention for weeks; almost since Ted's departure had given her the first sweet draught of revenge. An idea not the less strong because it was utterly, almost absurdly unreasonable. There are few logical crimes committed; a brain inflamed with malevolence is scarcely in a fit state for ratiocination.

Happily, the approach to murder had sufficed to startle Thérèse's woman's nature into a remorse, distorted and clouded, but genuine, and, in so much, the saving of her soul's health.

Sternest and gravest of all the stern, grave sisters was Thérèse; but gradually there grew upon her face that look which is a woman's best adornment, that which little children at once perceive and love, a "good" look.

But none of those who had once known her ever saw her thus. It was her aim to be dead to all her former life, and instability of purpose had never characterised Thérèse Van Heil.

Luigia heard nothing of her until years after, when her

own life had broadened into calm sunshine, there came a card, saying, "Pray for the repose of Sister Marie Thérèse," with the date of her death. On the envelope was written, "Sent by request."

After all, it is the good men do that lives after them.

When those whom she had injured had long forgotten Thérèse, a poor little crétin, the only creature to whom she had been kind, knelt and prayed for the soul of "the good Sister Marie"—superfluously, as we believe, but with a tender faithfulness that was good in itself.

The road to forgetfulness is a hard one. Luigia had forgiven Thérèse, easily enough, for threatening her with death; life was not a very precious possession to her just now; but, perhaps, had she known that other injury, she could not have done so. Not yet, while the wound still quivered and burnt, while the day mocked, and the night wearied her, till the light faded from her eyes, and, even when she smiled, they kept their soft, still shade, like the veiled eyes of the blind. The road to forgetfulness is hard and long, and there are those who turn aside, and take the shorter one of Death.

It was about this time that Luigia startled the doctor by saying, with the quietness of experience, "I think more people than would like to confess it have been, at some time in their lives, tempted to commit suicide; the wish to die is so natural, and the tendency to fulfil our wishes so universal."

For a moment the doctor looked at her, with a fear he would not speak; but the broad, firm brow beneath his gaze reassured him.

"No," he said, half audibly, "the little one is, emphatically, a woman that one can trust."



CHAPTER XXVII.

" SO LONELY."

LUIGIA was dying. Not painfully, not at first consciously ; but slowly and surely her life was ebbing away into the great deep of eternity. It seemed that her voice would retain its rare beauty to the last. Clear, and sweet, and true it still rang out ; but people began to say that there was sometimes something strange about it, and "something strange"—*i. e.*, not immediately intelligible—is not conducive to popularity. Also, about this time, there arose a new singer, who could do more wonderful things with her voice than Luigia had ever dreamt of, and who, by reason of her vocal gymnastics, became the reigning star. For Luigia to be received with comparative coldness was as crushing to her as a storm of hisses to a less favoured and less sensitive artist, and this, recurring night after night, was eating into her vitality.

Those flies which feed on small social carrion were beginning to fasten on her reputation, and to quote, sarcastically, the dictum of the critics, that "Miss Rameau still sang with considerable power and grace." "Still!" and she just twenty years old ! Also, fatal sign of a

decadence of empire, those who had been angrily jealous were growing amiably patronizing ; never had Luigia's gifts been so highly praised among her fellow-professionals ; never, therefore, as she knew, had they feared her so little.

Perhaps she had not cared enough for her supremacy while it lasted. Then, so it seemed on looking back, she had all things beside it : Youth, and Hope, and Love ; now, she had nothing—nothing but Fame to work for, and to live for, and that was slipping from her grasp.

But this, alone, would not have killed her. It was those terrible still hours before the daybreak, when she awoke from dreams poisonous sweet, with the touch of vanished kisses on her lips, and issuing thence, the half-unconscious, pitiful cry of "Ted ! Ted !" The fanciful diffidence which styled him Don Edouardo had all melted away, like a snow-drift under burning lava ; it was by the old, rough name of his boyhood that she called upon him now.

A stronger woman would have beaten down her love—a weaker nature would have gained the indifference of exhaustion ; but Luigia could no neither. She had not loved Ted because he loved her, not for anything that he did, but for what he was ; and, being still himself, she could not unlove him, now that he was her sorrow instead of her joy. So, through the night, even in her sleep, she prayed, "Let me see him, once again, before I die."

But there are prayers which God seems not to hear. Sometimes she would try to lull her heart with the opiate of resignation, praying only "God bless him—God keep him, though he never meet me again ;" but the refrain would come, "My love, my love, mine nevermore : perhaps he will love me in Heaven."

So, slowly and surely, her life ebbed out, no one noticed—no one knew. She was like a bird, that men think must be well and happy so long as it can sing. A little more pallor, a little less substance, were scarcely noticeable in her, who had always been fragile and pale. With the doctor and Huldah there had come to pass that which, in true marriages, will come to pass—they had grown closer together, till they were now all-sufficing to each other; and having, with an effort, weaned their hearts from holding Luigia as their very own, and resigned themselves to giving her up to Ted, they could not now fall back into their old relations, even had they tried. But they did not try, they were as unconscious of the change in their own feeling as of the equally gradual, and therefore imperceptible change in Luigia.

So, gently and willingly, Luigia was putting off Life, and putting on Immortality; and, as she neared the great river, Death, the solemn chant upon its shores seemed to be, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

All this time Ted made no sign. His letters to the Doctor came with a regularity that might indicate some strong feeling at the root of them; but they themselves were all facts. If ever a thought crept in, it was, like the fruit of a dry land, bitter and hard.

Ted seemed to be acquiring, young, that indifferentism which is the curse of middle age. By a strange coincidence, about the time when Luigia was in peril from Thérèse, Ted had been shot at by a treacherous native from behind a tree. He treated this quite as a matter of course, and only mentioned it incidentally, while propounding a theory of his, that these tribes were no original stock, but the result of centuries of deterioration.

He was not told of Thérèse's threatened mischief ; she had pleaded so piteously for silence, and Luigia shrank from having his sympathies roused in her behalf by anything outside his own heart ; so he simply learnt that Mademoiselle Van Heil had entered a convent and made no comment thereupon.

Luigia had been reading one night the beautiful history of Lazarus, and after closing the Book she sat thinking. "What a strange, peaceful life he must have led after his resurrection ! how impossible for little things to trouble him ! how, having once died, he could suffer no more !" Then, in a vivid flash, it came over her that it was her own life she had been realising ; with her, too, the nerves of suffering seemed to be killed.

She could accept it now as a good thing, that Ted had ceased to care for her—"He would not be so sorry after."

Little professional jealousies and stinging speeches could wound her no more now ; she answered them, if at all, with a sweet, direct simplicity, that left the speakers absolutely dumb. Even injuries she recognised only with a calm wonder that people should take so much trouble. A subtle, physical instinct was teaching Luigia to shrink from all "trouble" now ; she was glad, instead of grieved, to have fewer "encores" for her songs ; after one, she was always "so tired ;" and "it was well that people should not like her singing so much as they had done ; they, too, would miss her the less, be less sorry—after."

She had seen the doctor's thought concerning her ; his momentary fear that she would leap out of life unbidden ; and then his recurrence to the old habit of trust in her. This last was right, should be right. Luigia would never kill herself ; but—letting one's-self die, that was so differ-

ent—only like a little tired child letting itself sink into its mother's lap to be rocked to sleep. God would not be angry with that surely. He would receive her graciously, and love her freely. Was there not a text in the Bible like that? She was not sure; a strange dimness was creeping over some of her faculties, especially memory, and she was lethargically thankful for this.

The road to forgetfulness had been hard and long, but it was growing shorter now.

So, slowly and surely, her life was slipping away, and no one noticed, no one knew.

Signor Gondio was in Paris. Almost to his own surprise, his opera, finished now, had been accepted there, and was to be brought out in the spring. He had written the news to Luigia, with natural elation. Even Mahomet must have gained faith in himself with his first believer, and the director of the Grand Opera was no mean censor, especially as he would have to back his opinion with hard cash. "Now, at length," wrote the Signore, "the sky is softening for the sunrise; all my life long I have wondered, dimly, what men meant by hope, as a blind man wonders over colour, but it is dawning on me now. I can begin to look forward, as a child does, and fancy what pleasant thing the next day may bring me. I return very soon, and shall come straight to you, of course; you have always been my Boadicea."

He had been away a few weeks, and the change in her was startling. Luigia's face had always been distinguished by a fair, soft paleness; but now this seemed to be refined and illumined to the clearness of a transparent shell; and, from out of this opalescent white, her eyes shone larger, darker, purpler than ever; her hair was, as she had said long ago, "no colour" in the shade, but seen

as she was standing now, with a side light upon its crisp waves, there shone with flashing, amber tints—not the flaxen of the Saxon, not the red of the Celt, but the dark gold of the Cymru, which marks pure Welsh blood yet. White, purple, and amber, she looked like a flower made of jewels.

"Yes," said the Signore, half to himself, as he retained her hand, outstretched in greeting, "ivory, amethyst, and gold; it is right."

"What is?" asked Luigia.

"This I got for you at Dieppe; a compatriot of mine has settled there as artist in ivory."

He held out an ivory-bound prayer-book, rimmed and clasped with gold, her initials on an amethyst medallion on the cover.

To the last day of her life Luigia would be awake to any kind of art loveliness, like the dying poetess whose last word was "Beautiful." So now, her face brightened with innocent joy as she bent over the little book, the cover of which was rich with quaintest carving. Round the amethyst medallion was a wreath of lilies, the dainty, graceful fleur-de-lis; in each corner a passion-flower, with its triple-pointed leaves and broken tendrils; between these, most wonderful of all, for execution, tiny wreaths of immortelles. Truly, Pietro Marera was, what the Signore styled him, an artist.

"Have you been well since I left," said the Signore, "only a month ago?"

"Only a month, is it? but it seems sometimes to be given even to us to regard 'one day as a thousand years'—a bitter gain, though. I suppose knowledge is suffering."

He was silent, save for a closer clasp of the little cold

hand, by which alone he seemed to hold her from slipping away before his eyes into the Great Unseen.

Suddenly she said, in a tone of quick repentance, "How could I forget? My first word was to have been congratulation; you know that I am glad, do you not, Maestro mio? Now that you have gained a hearing you are safe. Remember," she continued, holding up a warning finger in mock earnest—"remember, when you are 'one of our greatest living composers' that I was the first to prophesy it."

He did remember.

"Would you mind running through the music of Boadicæa?" said the Signore, presently. "I want to see where the weak parts are likely to come."

"I should like it," Luigia answered, gladly entering into the lovely music.

They had an hour's perfect enjoyment—perfect, because Signor Gondio's opera was a veritable tragedy, with no incongruous tag of jollity joined on at the end. When they had finished, the Signore give a few short emphatic sentences of praise to Luigia's reading of the parts, and she said :

"It is queer : I can sing Boadicæa's songs when I can sing nothing else."

"It may be because they were in truth, though half-unconsciously, written for you : it was an old day-dream of mine, you know, that you should play Boadicæa."

"I suppose it is absolute fact, that everybody wants something they cannot get," said Luigia, musingly.

He rallied her gently on her pessimist philosophy ; then took leave, murmuring as he went home, "It is hard for a man to see his bird perish outside in the frost, and not be able to open his window and lure it in."

Frost was always the Signóre's simile of evil, he hated it so ; and not without reason. Just now, the early bitter winter setting in, laid him prostrate with his old enemy, inflammation of the lungs. When this was subdued, the docter fairly drove him off to Nice—any sheltered corner of Europe, where he could escape the piercing wind, and bask in the sunshine which his physical nature, at least, imperatively demanded.

So Luigia was alone again. She had no faith in Signor Gondio's recovery. There are states of mind and body when death seems the most natural thing that can happen to anyone ; and he had shown her the way in so many things, that she could think of him as going before her even in this. Cecil had gone, and little Lulu, and now the Signóre. "We shall be quite a choir in ourselves when I go too : they will want me to unite them ; none of them knew each other here. Does Lulu indeed 'know all' now, I wonder, as she said she would ? And Cecil, does he still pray God to bless me, as he did almost in Heaven ?" Looking forward thus, Luigia seemed to have nearly attained. She could almost feel her soul breaking away from its corporeal bonds, and fluttering its wings, before a final flight ; and so there stole over her life a soft, sweet hush, like that of the birds at evening—a hush at once restful and watching ; watching for the falling of the night.

But it was the morning that was coming to her.

Through sorrow, and change, and seeming chance, that was drawing near which was to save her yet ; perhaps the only thing in all the earth that could—the hand of a little child.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PUPIL.



GREAT grief had befallen the Varnes. "Baby," the merry, lusty sovereign of the household, was dead; killed suddenly, poor little fellow! by an attack of the traitorous enemy, croup.

Naturally the bereaved parents turned with intensified care to their only remaining child, an older boy, who, in the general baby-worship, had been somewhat neglected. Now that they took time to observe him, it was found that, after the fashion of solitary children, little Conrad had made a passion of a pursuit, this with him being music. It was rather an unhappy love as yet, for he spent hours in crying that "the piano would not speak," and, fretting thus over the dumbness of his idol, was growing pale and thin.

In despair Lady Varne consulted her old master, Dr. Heine, saying, "As you know, only too well, I am no musician." Her tone betrayed the mother-anguish that the deepest chord in her child's nature should be one she could not touch; but she continued, lightly, "He has quarrelled with his mistress, and grumbled at nearly every

one I have got to play to him, he is so dainty, little fanatico ! I verily believe he knows good music from bad."

" Not very likely, at six years old," said Dr. Heine ; and then a sudden recollection flashed upon him, and took the cynicism out of his face. He, too, had gloried in a little son, his only one, who, dying before he was seven years, would pick out a fugue for himself ; whom people had begun to talk about as a modern Mozart, and whose memory was more to him now than all his living daughters, these, it must be confessed, not having grown up lovable ; so many women together seem to harden one another. " Whom did you try as a music-mistress ? " said he in a very different tone from the one he had first used.

" Miss Lepoque ; and the little, naughty fellow cried that ' she splashed so.' "

" Precisely ! that is her very style ; he has ears, that is evident. I can tell you who would be the very thing, if she would take it—Miss Rameau."

" I had thought of her, but did not venture to propose it, with her immense popularity as a singer."

Dr. Heine knew that this popularity was waning, but, of course, had too much loyal *esprit-de-corps* to confess this to Lady Varne, an outsider ; so he only said, " Well, honestly, I don't know whether she would be bothered with him ; but women have a craze for children, and he is not a common child."

This last admission, though it was simple matter-of-fact, soothed the maternal dignity that was beginning to protest against " troubling Miss Rameau ; " so Luigia was written to, and accepted the engagement, on what she told Lady Varne were " ridiculously munificent terms for such a baby."

The first morning she had clear, Luigia went to Varne House, and was introduced to her little pupil—a grave, fair child, older in everything than his age, with only one remarkable feature in his face—great, night-black eyes, softened into beauty by long, golden brown lashes. She had stipulated, half in fun, that Conrad himself should decide as to her capability of teaching him, and, accordingly, played him some baby tunes, and asked if these “made the piano speak,” his usual test.

“Yes,” he said, with an impatient little frown; “they talk, but they talk nonsense.”

Seeking for something that should content him, she glided, half unconsciously into a movement of Beethoven’s, and, like most people when they find themselves in Beethoven, could not leave it till the phrase was finished; only a short, and apparently slight passage, not twenty bars long, but containing a whole volume of thought, and power, and calm. It bore her far away from her young listener, till she was recalled by his hand alighting, like a bird, upon her shoulder. Then she looked round to find the child-face all aglow, while he said, in a tone strangely reverent and glad, “Now its soul has come; it will not be dumb any more, the angel of the music.”

So Conrad accepted his new mistress, and the little, frail life saved Luigia’s. She could not indulge in sorrowful memories now that the sighing in her voice filled her baby lover’s eyes with tears, for he soon came to regard her with that child-love which it seems strange that we should ever so far forget as to speak of slightlying—an adoration which is not idolatry only because it is so innocent, and because, as a very little child once said, he ‘loved God for making people so’—“so” meaning so beautiful, lovable, wonderful.

Happily for his teacher, Conrad was by no means an easy pupil. His brain was so far in advance of his fingers, while his ambition ran ahead of both, and he had a strong, significant liking for the mathematics of music—an imperative desire to know "why" certain combinations produced certain effects.

To satisfy a child's queries on any subject, one need know pretty well all that is known concerning it; so, because he was a wise child, and she loved him, Luigia took up again those studies which she had once laid aside as the drudgery of music, and entered with gusto into the study of the old masters—those half-forgotten sages, so child-like and so grand, with their speculations half mystical, half-spiritual; so ignorant of much that common men now know, so seraphic in that wondrous, deep insight which pierces beyond knowledge. Such society was good for her. Like mountain air, it braced the sick nerves which Conrad had begun to soothe.

The music-room at Varne House was admirably adapted for its purpose—large and lofty, and unencumbered with furniture, even a carpet, the floor being wood-mosaic. Luigia found it delightful to sing in, and remarking this to Lady Varne one day, the latter proposed that she should use it for practice. Knowing the offer to be made in good faith, and that the room was out of hearing of the rest of the house, Luigia thankfully agreed, glad to exchange her own little chamber, so darkened by the shades of past griefs, for this.

Conrad was charmed by the arrangement; he had passed, by an easy leap, from the state of a general sceptic and scoffer into that of a devout believer in "Luigia mia," as he had somehow learned to call her; so while she sang, he lay coiled up on a lounge, and sometimes

fell asleep, smiling in his dreams. Luigia, suddenly remembering him, would cease, with a whispered "Poor child!" whereupon he would awake, affirm that he had been in heaven, and implore her to begin again.

The two spent hours alone, for Lord Varne was already deep in the whirlpool of political life, and on Lady Varne fell the burden of party sociability; they knew that the child was safe and happy, and so were glad to leave him with her.

One day Luigia took him to a chamber concert at the Academy, where his attention was at first concentrated on a lady who sat just in front of them, and had, he said in a shocked whisper, "such a dreadful wreath on her head;" but his critical mood melted into one of misery, when "a boy, not so much bigger than me," played the bass of one of Mozart's lovely sonatas.

He came home in a Mozart fever that beguiled Luigia into telling him the legend of the Requiem; how it was ordered by a stranger in black, who never returned, and how the poet-musician said, "I understand; it is my own"—and died when it was finished.

"That was a beautiful ending for a life," said Conrad, after a somewhat intent study of the piano keys; "only one's-self could write one's real requiem. That, now, would not be happy enough for a child's; it should be something like this." Softly feeling over the notes, he brought out a little air of singular originality and sweetness.

For her own composure, Luigia pointed out where the bass was wrong, with a matter-of-fact rigour for which she wondered that he did not hate her; but Conrad took all such crosses patiently, and only answered, "Please sing to me."

"What would you like?"

"That 'Ernst Traumte,' from 'Der Frieschutz.'"

"It goes down to where I have no voice."

But she sang the weird, beautiful air, and then he said,
"Don't let us talk ; let us feel it, over and over."

Luigia kissed the little, pale forehead laid in her lap, and thought, with a pang, how she was learning to love this child ; but Conrad was not to die, he was to grow up into a distinguished amateur, with a speciality for writing children's tunes.

If any one despises this last, let them only attempt it.

With her health, Luigia's voice strengthened, increased in power and certainty, and, just as she was ready for more work, more came. The successful rival who had eclipsed her suddenly eloped in some peculiarly disgraceful fashion ; there was a grand scandal, and public favour fell back upon Luigia, as an Englishwoman and a lady, with a style as pure as her life. She was borne back into the House of Fame, on a rising wave of popular appreciation, and her empire seemed precious, now that it had once been lost.

Conrad was not gratified by the change which his tiny hand had so unwittingly stirred ; his mistress had less leisure now, she was always being hunted up by some one.

One morning a professional acquaintance, who was one of Luigia's aversions, came to request, as a great favour, that he might stay and try over an awkward accompaniment for that evening. Luigia assented, indifferently, but Conrad backed from the room, with a child's uncompromising expressiveness ; she followed, to induce him to remain, saying, with the old-fashioned gravity that he liked, "Come and be introduced to Mr. Ardine."

"No," said Conrad.

"Why?"

"I think he does not care to know me."

"Possibly not" said Luigia, smiling at the child-like self-importance; "but he will like it when he does know you."

"There is another reason;"—in Conrad's speech this was, "Vere is another weason."

"Well?"

"I am jealous of him."

"You darling little goose! don't you know that I love you better than anybody?"

"I do not believe that."

"But it is true; at any rate, better than this inconvenient gentleman, whom I do not love at all."

So Conrad came, and was evidently charmed with poor Mr. Ardine's unattractive personnel, though he rather begrudged him his exquisite playing.

He seemed to have had a lesson against jealousy, for he manifested none when, shortly after, to Luigia's pleased surprise, Signor Gondio was announced.

The Signore had come to London on business, but dared not stay while the frost lasted; so, finding himself with a few hours and no more to spare, he sought Luigia, as a matter of course.

To everyone's satisfaction, Mr. Ardine took leave at once; he was always rather shy of his old master, believing him to be "a kind of a monk in his own country." Of course erroneously; but Mr. Ardine's ideas of a monk were vague enough to be broad, consisting chiefly of, "fellow like a big Blue-coat boy, only with a longer petticoat thing, that must get between his legs, and throw him down, you know, if he goes to run; it stands to reason."

Quite a little company of things was always “standing to reason” in Mr. Ardine’s mental chambers.

It appeared that Conrad had met Signor Gondio before, and had learned from him the soft Italian “Luigia mia,” which the Signore had taught him, as a solitary maiden will teach her parrot to say, “He loves me.” But such an interpretation would never have occurred to Luigia ; just because his love was so vast and deep, it seemed to flow round, and never to touch her. She only asked, in mimic wrath, how they dared to meet without her, and learnt that the Signore had been in London for a few days when she happened to be singing in Scotland, and that, having a slight acquaintance with Lady Varne, he had called with a present from her brother, an invalid who was staying at the same hotel in Nice.

“And I was with mamma,” broke in Conrad, “so I showed him the new piano, and I told him I had got a beautiful new mistress, and her name was Miss Wameau, and it was not a nice name, because I could not say it right ; so he showed me how to say ‘Luigia mia.’”

“That was kind,” said Luigia, smiling on them both ; “it is much prettier.”

Here Lady Varne came in, anxious for news of her brother, and Luigia laughingly apologised for holding a levée at Varne House.

“My dear little queen, you might hold a drawing-room of buzzing ladies, or a bear-garden, in here, and the rest of the house would never know it. I ought rather to crave pardon for never coming near you, and even now must run away.”

She stayed only to hear the unsatisfactory account of her consumptive brother, and then departed, with a soft

shade stealing over the bright gracefulness that had once characterised Lady Varne.

Luigia was to be fetched to a rehearsal from Varne House, so the Signore stayed there, and the two had a long, happy art-talk, interspersed with some bright little canzonette that he had brought her. Conrad sat between them, feeling delightfully grown up ; the Signore recognized his share in Luigia's improved health and spirits, and petted him accordingly, which was the tiny seed of a friendship between the two that was to grow like a palm-tree, and shelter the lonely manhood of the pupil, the old age of the master.

"When I am grown up," said Conrad, "I will build a chapel of music, and there shall be painted windows for Bach, and Palestrina, and St. Augustine, and Buononcini ; and Signor Gondio shall preach."

"What could he preach ?" said Luigia.

"He should preach, first, 'And they sang a new song, the song of Moses and the Lamb.'"

The answer was unexpected, and the listeners' smile of indulgence brightened into one of interest.

"A child is a wonderful thing," said Luigia, safely, for Conrad had at once fallen back into a happy immersion in his box of bricks.

"Yes," said the Signore, "every child is a true Catholic. I think Mohler has that thought somewhere in his great work on the union of the Churches."

"Do you believe such a union can be ?" said Luigia : these two had a habit of going down to the depths of life together.

"Yes, as I believe in the Millennium, or any other thing impossible with man, but possible with God. Of late, I have ceased to be impatient for it ; we gain a child-

like trust in Providence when it seems to be giving us the desire of our hearts."

"Yes," said Luigia, "your opera."

But the Signôre did not mean that.

"Every one who writes an opera ought to have a crown of leaves," said Conrad, breaking in again.

"What for?" said the Signôre.

"Why, as a sign that people are to fall down and worship him."

"There is your true Catholic," said Luigia, in laughing mockery to the Signôre.

With a child's quick instinct, Conrad perceived that his last speech had been somewhat of a failure, so he concluded with, "Sometimes one is wise, and sometimes one is silly, and one does never know which."



CHAPTER XXIX.

DANGER.

IT was the wonderful April of eighteen sixty-five. "Too bright to last," said the wise men; but Signor Gondio, basking in the sunshine that made London habitable to him, said that it was too beautiful not to be true, and, for once, his Italian philosophy proved to be right. The summer that came in spring stayed on, ripening into a tropical glory of heat and brilliance, and little children, catching up the talk of their elders, exultingly chirped, "In all our lives there has not been such a summer." The Signore was always jubilant when the sun shone, but this especial season seemed to have a brightness that, he said, "Set a little bird singing in his heart."

There were not wanting substantial reasons for this gladness. Very shortly "*Boadicæa*" was to be brought out, and it had gone so well at rehearsal, that all the theatre corps, from the director down to the giddiest little chorus-singer, had contrived, either by praise or pique, to express their opinion that this would be the opera of the season. It did not materially lessen the joy of this that sundry

cuts were necessary, and certain passages still had to be re-written. Of course the parts which had cost the composer most labour proved to be those which no one else cared for. He had got up the history of Boadicea to a perfectly impracticable extent, and wasted much harmonic skill that only resulted in making the orchestra too prominent in critical episodes. This last slip, which he recognised as soon as the director remarked it, mortified the Signore somewhat, but the kindly, gentle autocrat of the theatre consoled him with, "My dear boy, our greatest men have done the same; I never had an opera brought to me yet that could be worked as it was written."

Now, as ever, Luigia was his chief friend and confidante—the one to whom all alterations were first submitted; not because she was wise, but because she was so dear to him, and he had a loving superstition that her approval brought good fortune.

But on Luigia's part their mutual relation was less satisfactory than it had been, her happy calm had been stirred into unrest.

While Signor Gondio was nobody in comparison with "the distinguished vocalist," her friendship with him was considered perfectly proper; indeed, her fellow-professionals were rather fond of enlarging on his claims upon her, and wondering whether she was duly grateful to him for having "made her voice."

But now that several successful works had begun to render him famous as a composer, and floating rumours of a wonderful opera were gathering round his name, the Signore became a covetable star, and it was not soothing to know that Miss Rameau's influence was the only infallible talisman for securing him. With Tuscan frank-

ness, he never attempted to disguise this, though he was chary of mentioning her name.

One lady gave it as her confidential testimony to all the people she knew, that "she did not believe in such Platonic friendships," that, "in her opinion, people who cared so much for one another ought to be married, and done with."

It did not, in general, weaken the force of this fulmination that the speaker had the best possible reason for being dubious as to things Platonic; inasmuch as she considered the word a strictly impersonal adjective, and, if asked for an definition of it, would probably have replied, "Something like metallic."

This decisive dictum was carried to Luigia, and did its intended work, disturbing her peaceful enjoyment of the Signóre's old friendship. She could still smile at inuendoes, but for his sake, to keep these wasps from buzzing round his name, she determined to withdraw somewhat from their familiar intercourse.

This, however, was not easy. The Signóre was one of those who cannot be kept further off than they choose to be, with whom it is impossible not to fall into happy unreserve. He was so child-like in his gentleness and purity, and yet more in his various naughtiness—his waywardness and jealousy, and fits of laziness, when nothing but petting would make him "good," and when he would be "so sorry" after the mood had cleared away. In an Englishman, his character might have been undignified, but it was not so in him, and Luigia, born Italian as she was, had more in unison with him than she knew.

Thus it happened that the only result of her attempt at withdrawal was a dainty shyness, which caused the Signóre to reflect, "He who knows how to wait, should

know when to strike. I think the time for this is come."

He determined to write ; so, one morning, Luigia, not much surprised, found among her letters one from him. He had written to her once or twice before, on little matters which could not wait till they met ; so, though she hurriedly despatched the others, and took this up to her own room, it was only because the sun shone there, and she had a fancy for basking in the sunshine with this, her one faithful friend.

What she read startled and grieved her. "Is love to be his sorrow too ?" she murmured.

The letter began with a simplicity that was almost pathetic :—

"**MY QUEEN, MY LITTLE DOVE—**

"Do you know that I have loved you always—all these long years, while you have thought of me not at all? Povero me!"

This very simplicity enabled him to touch without offence on that which he had learnt by the sheer instinct of sympathy—Luigia's broken ties, and present freedom, if only she could love him.

If she could love him, that was the burden of the letter, pressed with a humility that provoked a smile of tender amusement that he, so lovable, should be so ignorant of his power. Luigia felt that, but for the desolating fire which seemed to have consumed her heart, she must have granted all he asked ; for a moment even, she seemed to realise, and rest in, her safe, tranquil life as a faithful happy Signora Gondio.

But this could not be ; so she wrote :—

“MAESTRO MIO, CARO AMICO,

“I think there can scarcely live a woman who would not feel a keen, aching pleasure in this, your letter, lying folded in my hand ; it feels like a bird that I, alas ! have wounded, and must slay.

“If, for some grievous sin, I had been doomed to sadden the one life I should most desire to cheer, I think it would have been just as it is ; for my heart, the passionate, wisely heart you claim, is dead ; it suffered much, poor heart ! cried out in its agony, and now it is still. When that stillness comes, that ceasing of the pain, the surgeons say, do they not ? that it means mortification, death.

“So it is, it seems to me, with our moral nature, when we have endured a mortal agony in any part that dies. Nature is merciful ; not twice shall we suffer any death-struggle ; it is better to go through live maimed than that. And yet, though I can give you nothing that you ask, I am not brave enough, not unselfish enough, to bid you altogether cease to love me ; if you do this of your own will, I shall be resigned, and cannot blame you, but my hand is not strong enough to put away the one sweet draught left in my life. Love me, just a little longer, Maestro mio ; but let it be as I love you, or, rather, as the angels love in heaven. If you had only been my father, we could have been so happy. Do not, please do not, be hurt at this ; it is no question of age, only our natural relation to each other. You have always been so far before me, so high above me, that I think we could never have been equals ; even had my heart lived, I should never have grown up to your level, so as for us to go hand in hand, husband and wife.

“We could never have been what you wish to each

other. Here and there, you know, one comes across the impossible. Things unlikely may be, things wrong may be, but the impossible—that is final.

"All through my life you have seemed like my spirit-father. When people have been cruel or unjust to me, the thought comes always 'the Signore will understand,' for we do seem to comprehend one another naturally, that is why I have written straight out of my heart now.

"Perhaps it is that we are kin, Italians both; for the Italy in me has never died out, never will, any more than you will cease to be Maestro mio, and I your little

"LUIGIA."

"It reads like a Requiem," said the Signore, when he had closed the simple, direct little letter, that was at no pains to be consistent even with itself, but flowed on with the unconscious prose rythm of deep emotion. "My daughter would she be?" he continued. "Well, I have that love for her too; love like mine includes all. My little Alpine rose, so high, and calm, and desolate; it is like her not to mock me with attempts at consolation. She accepts sorrow as the inevitable; but she is young to have learned this; so young, my love, my love! She shall not be harassed by yearnings of mine; I can wait now, as before—wait and watch."

But he whose heart's workings are the basis of his calculations speedily finds himself dealing with intricacies worse than algebraic. Just because he had kept silence so long, the privilege of utterance seemed sweet. The spell of dumbness once broken could not be woven again, his eyes would speak, and Luigia was blind no longer, but read his face whether she would or not; read that her hope of retaining his friendship had been only

the old, old error of a woman, that she must be either more or less to him.

Even the Doctor, with a discomposing departure from his system of non-intervention, said one day, "It seems to me, little one, that Signor Gondio is very fond of you."

"Yes," said Luigia, regretfully, "it will pass, I hope."

"Why should it?" said the Doctor, recognising her meaning with thorough man's impatience of things sorrowful.

"Why should the flowers fade? I do not mean to be sentimental, only I should be glad to have my old friend back again; and as that is impossible, seemingly, I would rather, if you do not mind, dear Nunký, that this new Signor Gondio was not invited here very much just now."

"Well, when you do speak, you are an honest child, I'll say that of you. I will remember when I don't forget."

Luigia's plan of avoidance was something like the Signóre's of reticence, it lacked the one element of possibility. Their friendship was so old that, in professional matters, it virtually amounted to an alliance.

If Signor Gondio wrote a soprano song, the publishers took it for granted that Miss Rameau would bring it out. If anything specially suited for her voice was sought, he was applied to, as a matter of course, by concert-givers and musical managers generally. Young aspirants, anxious for the help of both, regarded their cause as gained if they secured the word of either.

Luigia's one love being lost to her, there had died out of her heart all natural, girlish aspirations after wedded happiness. Under these circumstances, Catholic women enter a convent; Protestant women marry somebody else.

The advantages of either course are doubtful, but they are sure to present themselves with one-sided force to the mind that is turned towards them ; sophistry is an essential element of human nature ; logical minds turn out either heroes or monomaniacs, and a limited supply of these suffices the world.

Luigia had no latent capacity for becoming either. She was not, never had been, a hard thinker.

Long ago, the Doctor, as a kind of vaccination against the evil of her omnivorous reading, had tried to put her through a course of logic ; but the attempt came to an ignominious ending, on her declaring, after all his pains, that she "could not help feeling sorry for the postulate."

Then he had essayed to teach the refractory "little one" chess, with rather better success, till she discovered that it was "barbarous for the king to swallow up all the poor little pawns."

She could not keep general interests out of special subjects, and this weakened her grasp of a question, robbed her of that concentrativeness which often gives a small mind, for the time, all the force of a large one.

Had the Signore possessed this—a hard, one-idea'd determination to win Luigia for his wife, he would speedily have succeeded ; but then he would not have been himself, and so would never have gained his present footing. It was at once the strength and the weakness of his character to adapt himself to events, rather than attempt to alter them.

This adaptability did not extend to his conscience ; integrity was not so much a quality, as the essence of Signor Gondio's nature—its basis, the substratum, firm and undisturbable, on which all the rest was built.

Sincere, but not emphatic ; patient, but not calculat-

ing; boyish, but never puerile, the Signore loved and waited; and so, as innocently as in the old days Luigia and Cecil had walked to the edge of a material precipice, she and the Signore were drawing near to that every day tragedy, a marriage founded on a mistake. Luigia knew that it would be so, but did not perceive that she was drifting towards it. Signor Gondio saw whither they were tending, but did not know that it was danger.

The one person on earth who had power to hold them back was silent, far away.



CHAPTER XXX.

“DE PROFUNDIS.”

THERE were passages in some of Boadicea's songs which the Paris Prima Donna averred that she could not or would not sing.

Signor Gondio set about altering them, so as, if possible, to give the same effect in a less trying part of the voice, and, as usual, brought the altered portions for Luigia to sing, that he might hear and judge them.

They were thus engaged one evening when the servant startled them both by announcing, “A gentleman from Africa.”

Luigia's thoughts flew to Ted, and, vexed at steady old Margaret's attempt at mystification, she said, “What name?” so imperiously that the prim domestic in much perturbation withdrew, saying, “I will bring his card, Miss.”

Luigia waited, standing like a statue in tinted marble; the rose-leaf flush upon her cheek never flickered till, as she read the card, it faded to a dead white, the pallor of disappointment.

“Sir Charles Durnston,” she said; “ask him here, Margaret.”

Signor Gondio laid his hand on her arm, with that irresistible impulse of strength-giving which grows with love.

Thus Sir Charles Durnston found them, and muttered to himself, "A little flirt, of course, like her mother before her."

A man never forgives a married woman for forgetting that she is so, even if it be through himself, and the Baronet, aged fifty, looked back with very little sympathy on the "Charley," ætat. twenty-nine.

"Awful young spooney," he pronounced him, "any woman might have taken him in.—Wiser now."

Was it wiser? *Quien sabe?*

Seen through the reversed lens of this wisdom, Luigia was a coquette with no soul, and his good intentions towards her, if he had any, all vanished. Still, his gentlemanly instincts made him hesitate and stammer as he began:—

"Painful duty—my friend, Mr. Edward Vindon, commissioned me to give you a letter from him. You would have had it sooner by the mail, after all. I was taken ill on the road."

"The letter?" said Luigia, the veins starting into cords in the hand she held out.

"I was to prepare you first. He had that abominable fever; the day I left congestion of the brain set in. I am, unhappily, ignorant of the result."

Still, as though her strongest tension of self-mastery could only give her power to form those two words, Luigia repeated, "The letter?"

The other continued confusedly prosing about "necessities of his position obliging him to leave his valued young friend," till the Signore, with the rare energy of a

gentle nature, ejaculating, "Cruel!" fairly snatched the letter, and, handing it to Luigia, led her from the room.

Sir Charles, irate at such unceremonious behaviour, only awaited Signor Gondio's return to wish him, "Good evening," and leave his compliments for Miss Rameau, then they both departed.

Luigia's paralysed fingers could scarcely open her letter, and when she did so the words seemed to tremble and glisten, like stars in a misty twilight, as she read them through the haze of her tears—tears that overflowed at the sight of her name in the handwriting once so familiar, and always so dear.

It began abruptly:—

"**M**Y DEAREST ! MINE, AGAIN.—Death, the friend, stands by me, with his lamp. Life, and its clouds, and its darkness, have almost melted away, and, in Heaven's light, you, my one precious jewel, my amethyst, shine clearer and clearer.

"How could I doubt you, my darling, my darling ?

"Having loved me once—and you did love me, in all my madness I never doubted that,—having loved me once, it is in your nature to love always. Faithful and tender and true, I shall know you in Heaven.

"Do not write. By the time you receive this, I shall be there, or on my way home. If I recover, it will be by the sheer force of my longing to see your face once more, and hear you say, 'I forgive you, Ted.' Blind, and cruel, and mad as I was, can you forgive me ? "

"I think you will ; Christ-like, because, as he said, 'Those who have much forgiven, love much'—ay, truly!

"Would you have the whole story of my love ? its beginning ? Well, it was born on the morning when we

first met—oh, so long ago!—when you suddenly alighted on my path in the Doctor's garden, like the sprite that you were, dazzling my dull eyes, the first little lady that had ever greeted them. My darling, my darling!

"Then, after Brussels, with its mincing demoiselles, you came upon me like a revelation of fresh girlhood, so honest, and thoughtful, and pure! Do you remember that night when we looked out on the stars, and you quaintly told me that you thought that the star Alcyone, in the great Pleiades, must be the centre of Heaven, the place of the 'Great White Throne,' because round it our sun, with all its system, was supposed to revolve. We shall know soon: my darling, my darling!

"Then, in the depth of my art misery, when I found you standing beside me, my Beatrice, consolatrix, victrix, with your fair, soft pallor and luminous eyes; then all the soul I had kindled into love for you: my darling, my darling!

"But when we parted, it seemed as though I never had loved you till then. She is a little proud, my queen; she could not stoop to justify herself; falsely judged, she could only live the truth, not proclaim it. Silent, and gentle, and brave, she loosed me, since I would go; and never, in all my life, had I loved her as I did then: my darling, my darling!

"Sir Charles Durnston will bring this; he has done all for me, but he dare not stay till the end, whatever it be; he is fleeing for his own life. It is not so much that the fever is infectious, as that the air is full of it. I know he thinks me doomed, by the talk we had last night.

"I seem to have written calmly, because of the strange quiet of exhaustion; but beneath this, rending my heart in twain, is the burning, mastering desire to see you once

again before I die. I think if you had but kissed me when we parted, I could be content ; but when I remember that parting—my blind, brutal folly—I could go mad. If only once I might feel your hand in mine, the little soft, cool hand, it would heal me, even now ; would draw me even from the grasp of death.

"I cannot write more ; there is a strange dimness creeping over sight and sense. I can scarcely see these last words, nor remember what I have written, but I trust it all to you, and the last word mine eyes shall rest on—the last thought my brain shall hold is—Luigia."

Here the letter ceased, the waving lines and uncertain strokes telling their tragic story.

Luigia remembered Sir Charles Durnston's sentence, "congestion of the brain," and her heart went out in an "exceeding bitter cry :" "O Holy Father, save him, for thy dear Son's sake ! "

She did not know—she dared not stay to consider—whether he for whom she prayed might not be already dead.

In the strong necessity of her anguish, it seemed as though she could have beaten at the windows of Heaven to recall him—to recall him that, as she pleaded half unconsciously, "we may be happy for a little while, dear God, before we go hence, to return no more."

Exhausted, at length, she rose from her knees and sought out a text she knew : "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, believing, ye shall receive." Bigots have narrowed this down into the tyrant's, "If ye ask that which pleases me, ye shall receive ;" but still the broad "Whatsoever" stands there, limited only by Infinite Power and Infinite Love. Resting on this, as on the

hand of a Mighty One who loved her, Luigia fell asleep—slept and dreamt.

She thought she was with Ted, where he had never yet been, at Clyddfau, on the mountain where she and Cecil Mabington had been so nearly lost ; that, as on that day, a sudden fog arose, and Ted, placing her in safety, said he would go down and seek a path.

She sat still and waited, looking out into the grey darkness that seemed to wrap her round and chill her very soul, till hope died within her at the thought that Ted had fallen and lay somewhere wounded, perhaps killed.

Just as she started up in agony, there suddenly appeared a dove, which she could only describe afterwards as of the colour of moonlight. It flew into her lap, and, caressing it, she found under each wing a folded paper ; on the one was written, "Faith in God;" on the other, "Faith in man." Tied by these round the body of the bird was a golden chain. As she touched this, the dove outstretched its wings and flew off a little distance, like a mother-bird encouraging its young. One end of the chain remained in Luigia's hand ; she followed, and thus was guided down the mountain, through the cloud into the sunshine, down rocky path and mossy way, till she came to the wonderful little green valley that always seemed like the soul of Clyddfau. Here stood Ted, with his old radiant smile, saying, "I thought the dove would come quicker than I could." Holding her with one strong arm, he pointed to the exquisite green loveliness around, and said, "This is home ;" and she, resting on his breast, said, "Yes, this is home."

Luigia awoke. The dream was simple enough, might mean anything or nothing, but it had done its work, had given her calmness and strength. Now she could say,

what before she had instinctively felt would be blasphemously insincere, could say, "Thy will be done." She prayed still, but her prayer was no longer the impetuous demand born of anguish and almost despair.

Living or dead, Ted was her own again ; his soul, which had been sick, was healed, and she no more attempted to analyse this great bliss than an insect, poising itself on a sunbeam, attempts, on feeble wing, to follow it to its source.

She was impatient of, anxious to relieve, misery now, not because it was so plentiful, but because it seemed inharmonious, abnormal, wrong.

Luigia's music-room overlooked the studio of an artist, a lady, who, perched on a high stool, sat 'at her easel through all the hours of daylight, painting steadily, swiftly, mechanically, as other women sew, with no pauses of happy rest or loving contemplation.

She might have been possessed by some demon of art that urged her on continually, suffering no repose, save a most characteristic one. Sometimes, quite suddenly, with no previous intimation, palette and brushes would drop ; not flung down, but let fall, as from dead hands ; then the shoulders would heave in great sobs of weeping terrible to see, and Luigia, shocked and ashamed, would turn away.

In a few moments, the art tools would be resumed ; the poor, pale face would appear at the window, gazing upwards with an intent, pleading, longing gaze ; then the purple-rimmed eyes would bend over their work again, the firm, slight, artist-hand held by a will that would not suffer one tremulous motion.

Her sole companion seemed to be her bird, and even that was no bright canary, but a saturnine, mourning-

coloured, Russian mocking-bird, which she tended carelessly and hurriedly, only lingering now and then to dangle a meal-worm before his hungry beak ; with no playful dalliance, but mockingly, as though she taunted him with the vileness of his tastes. In the old days, Luigia had sympathised with, but not wondered at this neighbour of hers :—a life filled only with work and loneliness and sorrow seemed natural, one of many. Now, such a life appeared monstrous, not to be endured. She had wild visions of, somehow, flinging sunshine into the desolate heart, piercing the veil of silent tragedy which enwrapped it. Of course, as a veritable Londoner, she never accomplished even a bowing acquaintance with “La Desolata,” as she had grown to call her ; but, about this time, the Academy opened, and one of the earliest notices was a commendation of a work by a new artist. Luigia sought this out, and then, some impulse leading her to look among the addresses, found that the successful lady was her unknown friend. The painting was the brightest, sunniest little picture of a child at play. As Huldah and Luigia left the Exhibition, a poor woman with her children was coming from the National Collection ; one of the children, a little boy, stumbled and fell down the steps. Luigia picked him up. Lying contentedly within her arms, he said, with a curious look of awed delight, “Mother, it’s one of the picture ladies, the one with the lamb.”

“It’s St. John, he means, ma’am,” said the woman to Huldah. “A gentleman told him who it was, but Willy would have it it was a little lady, and begging pardon, it is like the young lady in the quiet, bright look of it.”

Quiet and bright Luigia might well look ; she had just now the joyous content of a little child. Willingly, there-

fore, she acceded to Sir William Mabington's request that she would come and spend a few days with him and his new wife. Having escaped Thérèse, he had contented himself with marrying a homely, middle-aged woman, more like a housekeeper than a baronet's lady. She felt the unaccustomedness of her new position, and, at the time of Sir William's invitation to Luigia, was fretting herself ill over the prospect of her first dinner-party.

"You see, dear," she said to Luigia, "Sir William thinks, because the little dinners to his friends have gone off so well, this is sure to be all right ; but he doesn't know ladies. They would like me well enough if I could behave as humbly to them as I feel ; but I must not do that ; for his sake, I must be Lady Mabington."

"Never mind," said Luigia ; "if they are not pleased, they will stay away next time, and that is just what you would like."

"Yes, for myself—but then—" Lady Mabington was actually crying, so Luigia, seeing that it was a case of nerves, fairly packed her up on the sofa, gave her a sedative, and privately sent to the doctor for a tonic.

"You will stay by me, won't you, dear?" said the distressed lady.

"Certainly ; and after dinner, sing these awful dowagers into such weariness that they will collapse, and be unable to criticise anything."

But Luigia's "certainly" was unfulfilled.



CHAPTER XXXI.

BLACKNESS OF DARKNESS.

SIGNOR GONDIO was in Paris, whither he had gone, after a somewhat hurried farewell, to be present at the first performance of his opera.

Luigia was still awaiting the dreaded dinner-party, but Lady Mabington was better, and consequently able to join in laughter at her former terrors. She and Sir William were both out, when “a gentleman who must see Miss Rameau immediately” was announced.

Expecting some professional emergency, Luigia descended, in that state of mild irritation which greets small troubles ; this vanished as she entered the room ; it seemed that all the forces of her life suddenly stood still, paralysed, for the visitor was Rameau, her father ; cool, authoritative, with the old evil smile upon his face, he rose to greet her. In all these years since she left him, Luigia had never fairly seen her father, had never looked into his eyes, she had not dared, and this meeting proved the correctness of her instinctive dread ; the very meanness of the cruel face that bowed her down with shame, drew her into his power with the fascination of terror.

As though he perceived this, and was satisfied, Rameau

made no attempt to explain his coming, but said peremptorily, "Dress, and arrange your portmanteau for Paris ; there is no time to spare. I have come for you."

"Why?" said Luigia, in the husky whisper of caught breath.

"Signor Gondio demands your presence—see." He handed her a paper on which was written, "Do me this one favour, I entreat. Francesco Gondio."

The monogram in the paper was confirmed by certain inimitable peculiarities in the signature ; it was undoubtedly the Signore's, still she could but repeat, "Why?"

"The opera will be ruined ; it has been delayed two-three times ; to-morrow it must be performed, absolument, and the prima donna, she has mal-de-dents, her face is —so."

He pointed to a puffy bronze Cupid that stood on the mantle-piece, and, even in her extremity, Luigia could not help smiling at the absurdity of the dilemma ; relieved, somewhat, by the feeling of amusement, she said, "But why come to me ? someone else could take it."

"No one but the second lady, and she is furieuse with jealousy—will not. Signor Gondio says you can, if you will."

"Yes," said Luigia, her art enthusiasm awakening, "I believe I could."

Rameau waited for these impulses to work ; one great secret of his power over her was that the mysterious rapport between parent and child gave him the key to her nature ; he said, after a while, "It would be a triumph the most magnificent, for you and for him ; you could sing the original music."

"Yes ; those alterations for Mademoiselle Fiori half spoil her songs."

"Come, then ;—it is for Art, for Fame, for Friendship."

"But auntie ? the Doctor ? they would never consent. I cannot."

"Vraiment ; I forget, they send me here ; how could I know where to come ? voilá."

He gave her a note, simply, "Go, little one, since it is necessary," written, as the Doctor often wrote still, with the left hand.

"Auntie ? "

"She was out. Monsieur said his word suffice, because there is such haste ; hesitate dix minutes, we lose the train for Douvres, all is lost."

Stunned and trembling, Luigia rang for her things. Rameau would not suffer her to fetch them; he interrupted the message she was about to leave for Lady Mabington, with an inquiry after her purse ; this she handed to him, and then was hurried down-stairs to the cab, in which was seated a stout Frenchman ; seeing her hesitate, Rameau said in English, "The agent for the Director, he accompany me that I do not betray monsieur."

They reached the station in full time.

Sauntering, smoking, up and down the platform, she met an old friend, whom she had become acquainted with at Dr. Heine's classes. Mr. Gusty was a character. He seldom smoked save in railway stations and public gardens, averring that in those two places of resort he did so on purely philanthropic grounds, to kill the insects in the one case, the smells in the other.

His air of innocent sleepiness disarmed the very officials, who would remark to one another, "Let him be, poor little gentleman, he's come from foreign parts, no doubt." Certainly Mr. Gusty's rough coat might have come from anywhere where there were good tailors.

Seeing Luigia, his cigar was tossed away forthwith, and he came forward to meet her, saying with a radiant air, "Of all the stars that cheer me most, Miss Rameau ! can I attend you anywhere ? "

"I only wish you could," said Luigia, with more heartiness than she knew of, the bright good temper came with such charm of contrast.

"I will, if you will let me ; anything short of Kamschatka I am equal to ; where are you bound for ? "

"Paris."

Here Rameau came between them, saying, "My daughter forgets. I attend her."

"My father," said Luigia, performing one half of the ceremony of introduction. Nothing in Mr. Gusty's manner indicated that he had never heard of Miss Rameau's father before ; his hat was raised with a grace which the Frenchman pronounced "French," but his inward comment was, "Nice black-looking specimen of a father you are ! Poor, dear little Miss Rameau ! I declare, if I had money, and she had nothing, I would ask her to run away with me to Gretna."

This being impracticable, he looked about for something in which he might help her, and discovered the little dog Faust crouching upon her dress.

"Are you going to take your dog ? " he asked.

Luigia looked puzzled, then, discovering Faust, said, "Oh, you tiresome doggie ! he must have followed me into the cab, it is an old trick of his."

"What will you do with him ? "

"I really don't know."

"It is simple," said Rameau, and, taking the dog by the collar, he swung it towards the line, where a train was just coming up. Luigia caught his arm, and said, "I go

back," with a flash that reminded him of her mother at bay ; he dropped Faust, who crept shivering up to Luigia.

" Shall I take him home for you ? " said Mr. Gusty.

" Would you ? I should be so much obliged."

" Of course I would do anything in the world for you."

His gentle, rallying smile brought the tears into Luigia's eyes. She began to give Sir William Mabington's address, but Rameau thrust her into the carriage, and the train moved off, Mr. Gusty saying, " I'll find it," and Rameau impatiently muttering a quick little volley of execrations.

Presently, however, he began conversing with his companion, the Frenchman, in a subdued tone of triumph.

With undefined misgivings clustering thick upon her. Luigia leaned back and watched the dizzying panorama of cherry-orchards, crimson with fruit, and hop vines waving in feathery green. Near a station at which the train was not marked to stop, it came to a stand-still, with a perceptible strain on the break power.

" Goods train not five minutes a-head," said the guard.

There was some confusion, and a dim notion of escape occurred to Luigia, but, as she rose to look out of window, she felt Rameau and the other stealthily clutching her dress ; then she knew that she was in fact a prisoner.

English girl as she was, by education and habit, she could not scream, nor call for help against her father ; she sank back half despairing, half with a curious sense of relief, that the decision was thus taken out of her hands, and that, through all, she was being carried on to play Boadicea.

As the train moved on again, Luigia made some trivial remark to Rameau's friend, but was answered by, " Madame, je ne parle pas un seul mot d'Anglais."

Then, falling into the common error of supposing that as he could not comprehend her she could not understand him, Monsieur began to congratulate Rameau on their probable profits out of the journey, since they had taken second-class tickets, and could charge the manager for first, and also, for as long as it lasted, use Mademoiselle's purse.

Rameau replied only by his infallible shrug of the shoulders, by which he conveyed assent to his friend, and depreciation to his daughter. Luigia was not concerned about the probable désagrémens of the journey, and indeed, when they started from Dover, was rather pleased to find herself lodged at the fore part of the steamer, away from the smoke and the smells. But a thunder-storm came on, and they were compelled to go below, when their second-cabin associates proved to be a large party of decidedly objectionable English, who were going to somewhere near Calais for a pigeon-shooting match, and were just in that state of semi-intoxication which a certain class of Britons calls "comfortable."

They seemed to take it in turns to deliver short political orations, chiefly on the merits of "Pam," and the claims of "The People." Rameau and his friend, calmly muttering "Si bêtes ! ces Anglais," ensconced themselves full length on a couch, and presently fell asleep.

Luigia was glad to seek the quasi protection of a pleasant-looking English girl, whose father, a prosperous tradesman apparently, was taking her and his little son for their first trip to Paris. He said, rather anxiously, "I did not think we should have to come below, Lizzie ; if you are at all afraid of these people, I will try and change our tickets."

With a look of trust that made Luigia's heart ache, the

happy daughter answered, "Oh, no, father, I don't mind anything with you ; and the sea is so quiet."

It was so, with a strange, dark, oily look over the waters, while the rain poured down in sheets, and the thunder boomed nearer and nearer.

Luigia almost wished for a little motion that should silence the pigeon-shooters, one of whom had caught "Lizzie's" father by the arm, and was giving him the biography of the only decidedly inebriated member of their party—a haggard-looking man, with pathetic indications of lost refinement lingering about him.

"He's a clergyman, do you know, sir ? Educated at —— College ; his father is rector of the place where I come from, but this one was always a spirity gent. We call him 'Parson,' as a kind of respect, you know. He's a capital speaker when he's had a glass or two."

Here there was a general cry of, "Parson, give us a song ?" "Give us a speech ?" But even with these, when one cried, "Parson, give us a sermon ?" he was instantly silenced by a deep, angry groan of "Shame !"

The poor inebriate was helped to his shaky feet, and then, with an awful travestie of what perhaps had once been his vocation, began with St. Paul's commencement at Jerusalem : "When brethren and fathers." Here he hesitated, swaying to and fro, and one of his admirers whispered, "It is sure to be a good one—he is always first-rate when he begins with that."

Very unexpected, evidently, was the next sentence, "I will give you a speech on this," holding up a glass of wine ; "this : 'Look not on the wine when it is red ; wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging.'"

Lizzie's little brother was suddenly, but withal gently,

laid hold of by the orator, who stood resting his clammy hand on the boy's curly head.

"My little boy, listen, and I will tell you what wine will do for you : it will eat into your strength, will wither your heart, will sodden your brain, and then, like the mocker that it is, will leave you your soul—for remorse, and remembrance, and woe ; only the lost know what it is to have a soul."

The tone of horror seemed to thrill through the callous assembly ; quietly the speaker was suffered to sit down, the glass of wine stood on the table untouched, and, for the rest of the journey, there reigned a curious stillness. The innocent, childish eyes looking out from under the trembling hand seemed to have brought a curious awe into the hearts of the gazers, though he, poor little fellow, only crept up to his sister, whispering, "I didn't cry, Lizzie, did I ?"

Arrived in Calais, Luigia thought she would imitate some of her fellow-travellers, and send a letter home. The courteous official of the railway post-office had already supplied her with paper, when Rameau came bustling up and fairly carried her off, on pretext of luggage, to a dreary waiting-room, where his companion mounted guard over her.

In the train, Lugia said, "Did you send word to the doctor ?" Rameau's face assumed a serious look, which, with him now as long ago, took the form of fierceness.

"Ma fille," he said, with terrible quietness, "we are in France now—la belle France." The old, canine smile made Luigia tremble yet. "It is well that we understand each other. You return to that scélérat le Docteur, nevare ; nor do you marry son neveu, ce Monsieur Vindon. I wait long time. I have patience. I inform

myself continuellement of your progress. I know all things of you. How? N'importe, c'est assez. Maintenant, you shall be opera singer, give to me, who have rights paternals, your moneys, and you marry this, my principal creditor, who will be for you an agent of the best, ç'a suffit—silence."

"The doctor will follow me, if he hears nothing."

"No, he will suppose you remain with the Baron de Mabington; the servants there know nothing, only that you leave with two gentlemen."

"But the note which you brought me?"

"Je l'ai fait; when he discovers, he will think you deceive him; he will forgive, nevare, I know him well."

"Then you told me a falsehood."

"Précisement; j'ai menti, plusieurs fois; je ne suis pas un Anglais, moi."

"Nor honest, nor a gentleman."

"Bon, ni honnête homme, ni homme honnête; you are fond of word-study, like your first love, Cecil Mabington."

At the reminder of that far-off, innocent time, Luigia gave a faint cry, and Rameau's friend, who was already curled up in ungraceful slumber, awoke with a mumbled, "Plait-il?"

"N'importe," said Rameau, and the three were silent—a long silence.

Luigia, looking out with dazed eyes over the wearying flats, lit up only by silvery willows, thought, "Was this truly a man, or was she the daughter of some menial of Satan, whose office was the tormenting of women and children?"

With the hurrying accompaniment of her thoughts the train seemed to crawl along, till, fairly exhausted, she fell

asleep ; awaking to snatch her hand from between the dirty, ungloved ones of Rameau's friend, who was apostrophising it as, "A beautiful English hand, the hand of a good wife."

With an irrepressibly eloquent gesture, she withdrew to the far corner of the carriage, but Rameau answered the other's look of amazed discomfiture with, "It is no matter ; she will marry you ;" and the cool, matter-of-fact sentence fell with the weight of a prophecy.

There was no danger that Luigia would sleep again. "This huge, repulsive man to be her husband ! never. But what would she have to suffer in resistance ?" A moment's blissful thought went to Ted, but he was no barbaric knight to rush in and rescue his wife from other men's embraces. Ted's wife must need no such rescuing.

The doctor ? but Rameau's evil subtlety had arranged for her to appear guilty of the one thing that could estrange him, the two wrongs he would never forgive—to have deceived him and disgraced him ; his verdict would be, "Let her go."

Huldah ? Yes, Huldah would love still, though her heart should break. With the very cry of her childhood, Luigia's soul went out in, "Auntie, save me."

She determined to write to her, and did so at once, on arriving at the hotel, but she had no stamp, nor money to buy one, and so was obliged to give the letter to the concierge, from whom Rameau of course procured it, on some trivial pretext.

The table-d'hôte was over, so dinner was served for the three in their own salon, and after eating what she could, Luigia eagerly accepted the proposal that she should retire to her own room, intending to gain the

strength of reflection. But thought would not come ; only a vague, dreamy wonder whether she was really to play Boadicea on the morrow ; and this seemed not so much a spontaneous idea, as suggested by some neighbours, compatriots, apparently, whose salon seemed to be somewhere behind her bed, and to contain a powerful, wiry piano ; by the aid of which a lady was industriously singing French songs with a strong Scotch accent.

The piano was a good deal out of tune, the lady's voice yet more so, but still she kept on with a perseverance worthy of her nation, while Luigia tried to cover her ears with the bedclothes, and at length half-smothered herself under the great pillow, moaning, "Even my ears will be gone by to-morrow."



CHAPTER XXXII.

“ BOADICÆA.”

NEXT morning, at rehearsal, Luigia was relieved to find that Rameau's assertion as to her being required for Boadicæa was true. She was received with even more than French graciousness of cordiality, with an empressement indicating the urgent need of her presence. The Signôre came forward with a joyous air, curiously tinged with surprise. “ You, my good angel, come to save us,” he said.

“ Did you not send for me? ” asked Luigia.

“ For some one. I did not know who, and was trying to brace myself for failure, though the director said he had confidence in the agent.”

“ It is my father.”

“ Ah,” said the Signôre, with an air of indifference that Luigia found strangely soothing. There was no time for more; she was summoned to the front.

As on the night of her début, the extreme of agitation had reversed its usual effect on Luigia's voice; even the Signôre was startled, and the conductor's praise grew enthusiastic. She did not attempt much floriture, but there seemed to be no limit to her powers, and “ La belle

Anglaise," or "l'Inconnue," was almost mobbed to the carriage-door.

As usual, Rameau hurried her away, bidding the driver stop at a well-known restaurant, where they lunched; her two companions tending her as carefully as though she had been a horse that was to win a race, and with about the same regard to her possible emotions.

To Signor Gondio, Luigia's coming, against all the prejudices and principles in which she had been trained—coming for him, seemed like an omen of triumph; not only for his work, but for that which, because he was man as well as artist, seemed now to over-shadow even this—his love.

Rameau had perceived something of this, and accordingly, determined that the two should not meet; so he proposed to drive from the restaurant through the Bois de Boulogne, to show Luigia a country house which a friend had lately bought.

Luigia assented indifferently. The house was a pretty little place, only that it looked as though it was made of white Parliament cake, and must surely tumble about its occupant's ears, overweighted by its abundance of small towers and impracticable balconies; but the garden was magnificent, and Rameau, grinding his teeth at the downy apricots, ripening in the sun, muttered, "It would be a grand place to burn."

They returned almost in silence, save when Rameau's friend pointed out the site of a once famous duelling-place, near which he had lived when a boy, and recited, with unctuous gusto, how, coming out of his mother's cottage one morning at dusk, he stumbled over a man lying stone dead among the leaves, his slayer having fled.

It was a relief here to be turned aside for the passing

of the Imperial carriage, which came by just then ; the Emperor, as usual, quiet, dignified, courteous, with the characteristic mingling of Italian and French traits in his face and manner. Strained as all her powers were, Luigia could but gaze with interest on this the most important visage in Europe ; the thoughtful, inscrutable face, a face to trust but never to understand ; with only one legible expression, that of fatigue—the pathetic weariness of one who does not look for rest.

This was repeated on the pale, sweet countenance beside him—the loveliest, Luigia thought, that she had ever seen ; perfect in colouring and in form, save where nature had sacrificed contour to expressiveness.

"Would you like to see Winterhalter's portrait of l'Impératrice ?" said Rameau.

"I think I would rather descend at the church—St. Roch, is it not ?—and rest there."

"As you will. 'Ici en ne croit pas,' you know ; but we will accompany you."

With these two companions, Luigia felt that she could not realise her half-formed resolve to kneel and pray. She stood blankly gazing at the golden morning radiance over the alter, contrasting with the awful pale Christ in the darkness behind ; a wonderful presentment of the glory and the agony of Calvary.

Then she was nauseated by seeing a penitent repulsively protruding her tongue for the confessor to place the wafer thereon.

Next, against her will, she was amused with a christening that was taking place in one of the side chapels. The infant was such a thoroughly French baby ; amiably self-possessed, it submitted to be sprinkled, crossed, and

crowned, with an air of charitable toleration for the antics of its elders.

At the hotel, Luigia found the theatrical dressmaker, who had come to make such alterations as were necessary in the loosely-fitting robes of Boadicæa. Even this modiste, poor, harassed little woman, contrived to intimate that she had heard of the morning's successful rehearsal ; but Luigia was only too conscious that her acting was, as is natural, far behind her singing—was, in fact, only carried off by her thorough knowledge of the part.

In the evening, however, Rameau and his companion, whether by design or not, did their best to work her up into that state of frenzy which will sometimes stimulate, or simulate, genius.

Monsieur le Porc, as Rameau called his friend, took the opportunity of handing Luigia to the carriage to press his flaccid lips upon his fingers. She answered with a low, shuddering cry of disgust, and Monsieur remarked to Rameau, “It seems to me that this Signor Gondio will prove a troublesome rival.”

“Not at all,” was the reply ; “we have only to denounce him for some of those old plots of his. His arrest will send him out of his wits, and, before the truth is known, we can ruin him by a report that his is a case for the ‘traveaux forcés.’”

With these words beating against her heart, Luigia went on as Boadicæa, conscious only of the shame and horror that she felt must be looking out through the stage sparkle in her eyes.

Her throat was swelling with the hysteria that Dr. Heine had once told her would be fatal to her voice if ever she sang while suffering from it ; but, to-night, even

this seemed only to give her greater power, and there was a sweet, subtle sense of expiation in the thought of sacrificing herself to the Signóre's work ; of giving him the dearest possession she had—her voice.

"I will sing to-night, maestro mio," she said, softly, "though I sing nevermore."

And so, through the miserable night, the artist in her reigned supreme. Her very anguish and despair kept down until they could rightly appear.

The first act was all brightness. Boadicæa, with her husband, Prasutagus the Opulent, was seated on the primitive British throne—a turf mound under four young oak trees ; these, slender and straight as palms, their branches pruned away to the crown, and there interlaced together, so as to form a canopy, like that which covers the Host in Catholic processions. Boadicæa, a happy mother, married in her girlhood, was busy with the future of her two daughters, fair and gentle girls.

That strange brightness which precedes the setting of the sun was shining over Britain, and the King of the Iceni seemed emphatically to deserve his second title of "The Fortunate."

In the second act Prasutagus died, bequeathing his wife and daughters to the ominous guardianship of Nero.

Boadicæa knelt beside her dead, deaf to the consolations of the Druids, until, from out of the forest temple near by, one of the sacred hares leapt in through the ever open door of the rude palace, and, with the boldness of conscious safety, crept up to her.

In a pause of weeping, Boadicæa raised her eyes, and found those of the hare fixed upon her with their soft, serious gaze.

Deep, though only half acknowledged in the Druid

faith, lay the belief in the transmigration of souls. The desolate wife at once accepted the gentle, sagacious animal as the spirit of her lost husband ; cherished it in her bosom, and never parted with it till, in the last fatal battle, it escaped from under her mantle and fled ; and with it vanished her indomitable courage, and the confidence of her army.

The next act was filled with the shameful wrongs inflicted by the Romans on the queen and her people. As she said, "The time for patience had passed, and she, though a woman, was determined to conquer or to die ; the men, if they pleased, might live and be slaves."

There was no need to sting the Iceni into action ; their passionate love for "the beautiful Queen, whose skin was like the bloom on the crystal, her hair like the sunset cloud," was kindled now into a frenzy of wrath, a mad longing for revenge, which could be content no longer with plots against these Romans, but must attack them openly, dreaded though they were, as half gods and half brutes.

Then came the fatal battle near Londinium—of course confined, on the stage, to Boadicæa's immediate neighbourhood—the terrible, bestial slaughter, from which at length she fled, her royal mantle trailing in the dust. She gained the heights north of the city, and then, having lost all—throne, and people, and kindred—prepared to die ; not by poison, the Britons were no poisoners, but on her own spear, as one of whom she had never heard "fell upon his sword, and died."

Planting the ashen shaft deep in the soft clay, she leant upon the pointed metal blade till it pierced her robe and entered the soft flesh above the heart ; then, leaning heavier, with a short inarticulate cry of pain, she

stood to curse her victors, not with the fury of a beldame, but with the awful, calm indignation of a dying prophetess, ending with "The time shall come, when Rome is the weakling of the nations, that another Boadicæa, fair-haired and silver-voiced, shall rule in Britain, and shall be in deed, as well as in name—Victoria."

Our "good little Queen," as they call her, has been popular with the Parisians since her visit to them ; so, at this passage, the audience rose with simultaneous respect, but silently, and only for an instant, the spell of the coming agony was upon them.

Suddenly the music changed, from thunderous resonance to a strain of ravishing sweetness; the time for cursing had passed, that of blessing had come. With the solemn fixity of the last change stealing over her features, Boadicæa chanted, "A blessing, O ye Gods! upon my people." Then, with the death smile on her face, fell back and died, hidden by the gorse thicket surrounding her.

There was a moment's absolute stillness, a hush as of held breath, while the solemn, beautiful music died away. Then the applause burst out—a volume of sound; for once, a new author and actress were both accepted with enthusiasm.

But Luigia, even through the semi-delirium of impersonation, had seen a look of awed pity in the eyes of those who approached her, and was prepared for the gentle solicitude with which, when all was ended, the Director led her away by herself. "My child," he began, then hesitated—"your father."

"Yes," she said, quietly. It seemed only natural that this new horror, whatever it was, should come through him.

"Tell me," she said, reassuringly ; "I can bear it."

"You do not know—Hélas ! it is too terrible—my poor little one—he is dead."

"Dead !" she repeated, standing motionless now, in utter credulity. "Dead ?"

"You must forgive. It was just as the last act began—instantaneous ; nothing could have been done, they dared not call you."

Still Luigia repeated her blank denial, "Not dead."

The Director, himself pale and trembling, led her to a little property room where, on a heap of crimson banners, Rameau had been laid.

Some new machinery had necessitated the removal of a part of the flies at the last moment ; he had not known or had forgotten this. Wishing to cross the theatre without descending to the stage, he had stepped on a loose plank, fallen from the giddy height, and, his head coming against an iron crane, been killed at once.

Luigia heard all this, mechanically, as men lost at sea hear the moaning of the wind.

She realised only that he lay there, dead—her terrible father, terrible no longer ; and ignoble no longer. Death, the artist of Heaven, had carved the marble face into a look nobler, purer than it had ever worn in life.

Still, reposeful, innocuous as an angel, that which had once been Rameau lay at rest ; the banners beneath him and a Roman helmet on the ground by his head seeming to give him the grave dignity of a sleeping warrior.

One of those vivid flashes of memory which arise independent of the will brought back to Luigia the last time she had seen him lying prostrate ; the garden at Hendon, and little, fair Lulu, with her pronunciamenta which

Luigia repeated now, with deeper meaning, "After all, it is my father."

For the first time since her babyhood, she pressed a kiss upon his cheek. From henceforth, he was only—her father.

Suddenly, a strange wave of sweet, tropical fragrance seemed to fill the air, and with it a wonderful luminosity ; trembling, she looked up. Framed in the dark doorway was a face she would know in Heaven ; she gave one long, searching glance into the brown eyes, and then, with a cry of that ecstasy which comes only once in a life-time, she sprang, and was folded close in Ted's arms. But the reaction was too much ; with a pitiful, "Oh, hold me ! I cannot see !" she fell away into the realms of unconsciousness, and lay in a deep swoon.

Beneath Ted's passionate kiss, the crimson flooded her lips again, but her eyes remained closed and still.

Signor Gondio had been detained in another part of the theatre by congratulations, and had but just heard a confused account of what had happened. He came in now, and Ted, with an Englishman's expressive wring of the hand, pointing to Rameau, said, "Will you see him laid in Père-la-Chaise, as her father ? I must get her from Paris to-night."

The Signore bowed in assent, and Ted added, "Will you bring her to the carriage, while I prepare Mrs. Murray ? I can trust her with you."

"You may."

The words meant more—meant the recognition of two noble souls by each other.

The Signore saw it all, knew that it was in truth only the beautiful shrine of a dead Hope that he held in his arms—the Hope that would revive never more. Purely

and reverently, as men give the last caress to the dead, he stooped and kissed the pale lips that did not redden for him.

"My love is dead," he said; "my love is dead—is dead."

The work of his life, the child of his genius, had attained a greater triumph than even he had dreamed of; but that other, dearer joy, which had grown beside it, was suddenly cut down and withered.

The successful maestro, the idol of Paris, wept out the night of his triumph in the Champs Elysées.

There, under the quiet stars, the man in him was stronger than the artist.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

REST.

T was three days after.
Luigia had not yet recovered from her swoon. She lay in a soft calm that was neither sleeping nor waking.

Speechless, but as it seemed not absolutely unconscious, for she answered, in some voiceless, eloquent way, every touch of Ted's hand or his lips, and had smiled a curious little smile of contented acquiescence when Mr. Andersen, the medical man called in by Huldah, had, after examining her throat, pronounced it fatally strained, the vocal powers destroyed.

The Doctor would not see her; he had been alarmed, perturbed, bewildered, and a man does not readily forgive these.

One of the old, black fits of temper, such as had not appeared for years, came down upon him, and Huldah could only break her heart in patience.

This morning, however, Mr. Andersen had gone to him, and said, "I tell you honestly, I do not know what to make of Miss Rameau; you must see her, it is just one of your cases."

"What have you tried?"

"Stimulants, as strong as I dare ; they have no effect."

"Reverse the treatment, it is exhaustion ; nature would prescribe sleep."

"I dare not put her to sleep. I believe she would not wake again."

Startled, the Doctor went up to Luigia ; in tones not so much unlike his old affection, he said, "How is the little one ?"

They did not expect her to reply, but it seemed that she had missed him, in that strange middle world where her soul had been suspended between earth and heaven ; she answered, "Where have you been ?" and the changed voice, the worn, pitiful, innocent face, broke down the barriers of offence ; in penitence, as well as forgiveness, the Doctor took the little passive hand in his, and then, at last, her over-charged brain found relief in tears ; the eyes, fever-dry so long, were bathed in a blessed rain. Nature's medicines, weeping and sleep, healed her sick child, and Luigia recovered.

Now, at length, the Doctor's harassed family could compare notes, and learn the whole of what each knew only a part.

It appeared that Rameau had never been to Gwynne Street at all, but having, in his mysterious way, learnt that Luigia was staying with Lady Mabington, had gone straight there, seizing the opportunity as a favourable one for taking possession of his daughter.

On the same afternoon, Ted, arriving from Africa, restored in health, had gone to see Luigia, and bring her home, just as Sir William was setting out to acquaint the Doctor with Mr. Gusty's account of their meeting at the railway station. His narrative, taken with the fact that no message had been left with the servants as to Luigia's

destination, had roused a suspicion that she had been in some way entrapped, and, at the mention of Rameau, Huldah had, as the Doctor said, gone wild altogether, and insisted on setting off for Paris at once in search of her child. Mr. Gusty had given them that one clue.

"Then you did not have my letter?" said Luigia.

"What letter?"

"I wrote at once from the hotel, but I had to give it to the concierge; I suppose—"

There was no need to finish the sentence; they surmised aright what had become of the letter.

The only mystery that remained was how Rameau had obtained the minute knowledge of their affairs which he had more than once displayed. This was cleared up very shortly.

The Doctor's old attack of paralysis had left him with a slight uncertainty in walking that made him glad of a companion, and one morning after Luigia had regained her strength, she went with him to call on his publishers.

Turning into Great Marlborough Street, they came suddenly upon a little crowd, the nucleus of which appeared to be a stolid policeman, and a scared, bewildered-looking woman, who, as they drew near, made an effort to rush forward, crying, "Oh missy, Miss Luigia! don't you remember me? do know me, my pretty, for pity's sake."

"What do you know of the lady?" said the policeman, with a gruffness indicative of suspicion.

"Knowed her long ago—don't you remember, my deary, when you was ill and I saved your life with a kitten, at Mrs. Smith's, what choked herself after, blessed angel! with a muffin—a fine strong lady she was, too, with as hearty a cough as you'd wish to see, but she died

of it at last, poor dear ! I told her it would be so, many's the time."

The woman spoke with some regretful reproach in her tone, as though the cough had been a kind of dissipation in which her mistress had indulged too freely. She continued : "Yes, poor dear ! she was havin' her sup o' tea, when it come on, with muffins, me patting her on the back like wildfire. 'Celia,' she tries to say, and 'crumplet,' and before I could give it to her, she was in heaven—such a pity, to be sure."

"Oh, I remember Celia," said Luigia ; "she was the servant where auntie and I lodged. What can she be accused of ?"

"Stealing, miss," said the policeman ; Celia burst in "Stockings, deary, that 'ud no more fit me than they would a elephant ; me that wouldn't steal a babe unborn."

The Doctor had such a strong bias towards impartiality, that, in any judicial proceeding, one would rather have been his enemy than his friend ; but he remembered, and had some faith in Celia, and accordingly proposed that they should take a cab, and all, policeman included, go back to the scene of her accusation—a French laundry in the neighbourhood.

They arrived just in time to find that her principal accuser—the woman who had found, and, as Celia declared, put the stolen hose in her box—had picked a quarrel with her mistress, and was being sent away.

"Oh, Jeanne ! you wicked woman ! I believe you only want to be off," sobbed Celia.

"Jeanne ?" said Luigia ; "I think that is the woman whom Thérèse knew, and who seems always to have brought home the linen, though we have once or twice changed our laundress."

"She was a spy, Miss," cried Celia, "though I never knew who on. There was a Frenchman used to come after her, to hear all she could tell him of some family whose washing she used to take home. I came upon her and him once at their palavering—that was what turned her agen me."

"What sort of man was he?" said the Doctor.

"Well, sir, it was dusk, and I was struck and frightened like, and it don't take much to make me stupid; but he did remind me of Mossi Rummle, Missy's papa—it might have been only both having a foreigneering look."

The policeman, with official sagacity, had employed the short interval in detaining Jeanne, and compelling her to turn out her pockets—a measure which resulted in such a display of odd handkerchiefs, laces, &c., that the head laundry-maid was dissolved in tears of rage and mortification at having thus missed the real culprit.

Jeanne, terrified by this cold, passionless gend'arme, fell on her knees and made a full confession of what the Doctor and Luigia had begun to suspect—that she had been the tool of Rameau, in supplying him with the intelligence he desired concerning the Doctor's household. He had brought her to London with him, after she had ceased to be useful in his shadowy intrigue with Thérèse, and procured her a situation as blanchisseuse, with what seemed to her Flamande notions a magnificent salary.

Now, for some weeks, she had heard nothing of him, and she had grown so used to the small payments he had made for her services as to be embarrassed by their sudden cessation.

"He promised to give me some real English stockings of thread," she cried, "and he gave me them, nayvare." So she had procured these for herself, and fixed suspicion

on poor Celia, who, now that deliverance seemed near, was indulging in her pet luxury of tears.

The mistress of the laundry, finding the lost property restored, said that she washed her hands of the matter.

The policeman asked the doctor if he would like to set up a charge of conspiracy, and being answered in the negative, walked off peaceably.

The doctor, anxious only to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling that a spy dwelt near him, asked Jeanne if she would be willing to return to her own country?

Hearing that her patron was dead, she seemed glad to agree to the proposal ; and a good priest was discovered who took charge of the passage money furnished by the doctor, and saw Jeanne safely established in her native place, a poor little village near the Scheldt.

She seemed to have had enough of wrong-doing, and settled down respectably enough ; acquiring the dignity of romancist to the district, on the strength of her experiences in "that wicked and terrible Londres."

Celia, poor soul, was helped to set up a laundry of her own, where her normal state of puzzlement was completed by her becoming a prosperous woman. As she was wont to observe, of course with tears, "It's wonderful how things come right at last. I never did give up hope, till I found myself going to prison, and, behold ! that was just when my fortune was coming to me. Such a beautiful fortune, too ; to be my own mistress, after all ; and the women enough to drive one crazy, and lime so dear, and all—it's beautiful. I can forgive my enemies quite easy, Miss Jeanne."

"It seems to me," said the doctor, privately to his family, "that a Yankee would describe us, for the last few weeks, as 'runnin' round, forgiven' everybody, permis-

cus.' The wife and I went through that little ceremony first ; and it was hard for me, because she had been in the right all the while. Then Luigia and I had a private scene of reconciliation, though I don't believe she half knew the kind reception I gave her when you brought her home,—did you, little one ? ”

“ I can dimly remember thinking that you had gone back to your old medical habits of shaking hands a long way off ; when one has only half a brain, it seems to be curiously reflective.”

“ Ah ! if yours had been a little smaller you might have made a reason.”

“ A novel requisite.”

Here the doctor and Huldah were called away, and Ted said, “ Am I to be the only one unforgiven ? ”

She trembled a little, and said, “ I have nothing to forgive.”

“ Nothing ! ” he repeated, in one of his deep organ tones, compelling her to answer, “ I forgive.”

“ And love still ? Can you, little one—Luigia ? ”

She tried to rally, in a half laughing appeal that he would have some pity, but he replied by a look that said his need had reached a stress beyond mercy.

“ Sweetheart, tell me, do you love me ? ”

With a little flush she said, “ You know I do.” Then she hid her face where it could best hide.

He held her close, silent in the deep hush of happiness, the equipoise of perfected force. The climax of emotion, like the centre of motion, is absolute quietude. With the sense of this upon him, Ted looked into the eyes of his betrothed, and said, “ What does it feel like ? ”

She smiled at him and answered, “ Rest.”

THE END.







